

THE *CRATYLUS*
PLATO'S CRITIQUE OF NAMING

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TIMOTHY M.S. BAXTER
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BY

TIMOTHY M.S. BAXTER



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To my parents

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PREFACE

This book is a revised version of my doctoral thesis entitled 'Problems of the *Cratylus*', accepted by the University of Cambridge for the degree of Ph.D. in 1991. I first encountered the *Cratylus* in the third year of my undergraduate degree, and was intrigued and puzzled by the etymologies, which constitute the bulk of the dialogue yet are commonly dismissed as half-serious word-play. When I returned to Cambridge to embark upon graduate work it was to the *Cratylus* that I returned, conscious that here was a dialogue which would repay intensive study. This book is the result. My chief hope is that I have presented a rounded and convincing interpretation of one of Plato's most teasing dialogues; however, if I can at least persuade more readers to take seriously the whole dialogue, including the etymological section, the book will have served its purpose.

I am conscious of large debts to those who have aided this project. Firstly, my supervisors, Professor M. F. Burnyeat and Dr M. Schofield, helped me greatly with guidance and encouragement; the examiners of the thesis, Dr D. N. Sedley and Professor J. Mansfeld, were both very generous with advice. None of the above is to blame for the imperfections which remain. I owe Professor Mansfeld a further debt for encouraging me to publish this work in the *Philosophia Antiqua* series. Thanks are also due to Professor R. G. G. Coleman and Dr S. D. Goldhill who answered individual queries; to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, for financial assistance towards the cost of preparing the work for publication; to S. J. M. Watson for technical assistance; and above all to Emma Seymour for more than I can say. Last but not least, this book is dedicated to my parents, with all my love.

INTRODUCTION

Why devote a new study to the *Cratylus*? Given the wealth of secondary literature one has to justify another attempt to solve the problems modern readers find in interpreting the dialogue.¹ My excuse for adding to that weight of scholarly material is a conviction that more needs to be said about the central exegetical problem of the dialogue, namely, accounting for the dominating role of the etymological section. This farrago of ingenious word-play and exuberant linguistic speculation takes up over half the dialogue and is unparalleled by anything in Plato's other dialogues, or indeed in extant Greek literature. To modern eyes it appears somewhat ludicrous, a joke that outstays its welcome, far inferior to the 'real' philosophy that is carried on in the opening and closing sections of the dialogue. Plato, it appears, is guilty of a considerable error in philosophical and literary judgement.

There was a time when scholars believed that behind the etymologies we were to see the shadow of some philosophical enemy of Plato's, the favourite candidate being Antisthenes.² The evidence for this claim was not convincing, but few alternative hypotheses have been put forward. Instead, recent scholars have in the main concentrated on the opening and closing sections of the *Cratylus*, where we find what one might call the argumentative core of the dialogue, and have ignored the etymologies.³ Others see the etymological section as a strange early essay on the Greek language, or on language in general,⁴ of interest to scholars and historians of linguistics; or as a brilliant exhibition of the mysterious evocative and mimetic powers that words possess,

¹ See J. Derbolav, *Platons Sprachphilosophie im Kratylus und in den späteren Schriften* (Darmstadt, 1972), pp. 221-312, for a survey and bibliography of secondary literature on the *Cratylus* from the early nineteenth century to 1971.

² This tendency to see Antisthenes everywhere was particularly strong in the nineteenth century. One can still see it for example in A. Steiner, 'Die Etymologien in Platons *Kratylus*', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* N.S. 22 (1916), 109-132; Steiner argues that the etymologies of the names of virtues and vices are parodying Antisthenean etymological practices.

³ The function of the etymologies is obscure and, as far as this paper is concerned, will remain so. The first and last sections of the dialogue, however, are more accessible.' Thus writes M.M.A. Mackenzie in her paper 'Putting the *Cratylus* in its Place', *Classical Quarterly* 36 (1986), 124-150 (p. 124).

⁴ Frequently the view is expressed that the *Cratylus* is an essay on the origins of language, e.g. by H.N. Fowler in his Loeb translation of the dialogue, p. 4; I will argue against this view of the dialogue below. Others have seen the dialogue as anticipating in various ways aspects of modern linguistics, e.g. M. Leroy, 'Die Sprachwissenschaft—antike und moderne Ansichten', *Altertum* 20 (1974), 81-99.

to be studied by poets and others interested in literary effects.⁵

This modern divorce between different disciplines is quite foreign to Plato, and it hampers interpretation of the *Cratylus* in particular. Given this situation, there is room for more work to be done on the dialogue, work that tries to produce a more unified interpretation, one that does not regard the etymologies as a tedious display of Socrates' verbal dexterity, but tries to explain how they are an essential part of the dialogue. To do the *Cratylus* justice one must do the etymologies justice. To do that is the central aim of this study of the dialogue.

The etymologies are not the only problem of exegesis that the dialogue offers however. Further difficulties lie in interpreting the theories outlined by Socrates and his interlocutors, and in assessing what of value survives the aporetic conclusion, besides the warning not to put one's trust in names. Or in other words: does a recognizably Platonic theory of language and naming survive the dialogue? And if there is a Platonic theory of naming that survives, why is the *Cratylus* the only place where the problems of naming and etymology appear at length?

A third area of difficulty is centred on Socrates' interlocutors, Cratylus and Hermogenes, in particular the former, reported to have been Plato's first teacher in philosophy. What we are told about him elsewhere and what we read here does not seem to add up. I shall discuss this problem, and Cratylus' role in the dialogue. In addition, I shall devote some time to discussing Hermogenes, who is usually unfairly dismissed as a lightweight opponent for Socrates.

The most general problem of all is the place of the *Cratylus* in Plato's work. Here a difficulty that confronts any commentator is the more than usually teasing quality of the dialogue, which combines, Janus-like, a playful style and an aporetic conclusion that seem 'Socratic' with various themes that appear to link it to later dialogues like the *Theaetetus*. This has led scholars to differ widely in their estimation of the intent and quality of the dialogue: thus A. E. Taylor considered the *Cratylus* to be a minor Socratic dialogue designed to show the use and function of language and to portray Socrates in one of his more whimsical moods;⁶ Ross declared that it is in the main about etymology and nothing else,⁷ whilst Mackenzie sees it as a sophisticated series of interlocked paradoxes whose combined effect is to attack the theory of Forms.⁸ One could easily multiply this list. The fact that good scholars have differed so greatly over the dialogue is evidence of its Protean qualities.

⁵ See G. Genette, *Mimologiques: Voyages en Cratylie* (Paris, 1976), for a survey of philosophers and poets who have held differing versions of the belief that some words at least are mimetic representations of things.

⁶ A.E. Taylor, *Plato: the Man and his Work*, seventh edition (London, 1960), 75-89 (p. 78).

⁷ W.D. Ross, 'The Date of Plato's *Cratylus*', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 9 (1955), 187-196 (p. 191).

⁸ Mackenzie, art. cit.

One can affirm that in some sense or other the *Cratylus* falls between the earliest Socratic dialogues and the later so-called ‘critical’ works. Having said this however, one is faced with a series of interpretative decisions that seem to demand a stand on the *Cratylus*’ place in Plato’s development. To take an important example, does the fact that Socrates says he ‘dreams’ about αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, ἀγαθόν etc, at the close of the dialogue mean that he is looking forward to the future certainty of the *Republic*, or is he casting a critical backward glance at the excesses of his middle-period metaphysics? Or are these not mature Platonic Forms at all? Similar remarks can be made about the treatment of falsity: is Plato pointing forward to the *Sophist* solution, or is he still puzzled as to how to deal with τὸ μὴ ὄν?⁹

Two recent works on dating Plato’s dialogues have, despite following very different approaches, both argued that the dialogue is to be placed in the late 370s B.C., after the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium* and before the *Republic*, *Theaetetus* and *Parmenides*.¹⁰ This dating is consistent with Plato looking both forward to the later ‘critical’ dialogues and back to the Socratic works. It allows one to take a relatively agnostic position on the precise position of the dialogue in Plato’s *oeuvre* in favour of stressing how Plato challenges the reader to react to the problems and aporiai of the text in a positive fashion. Such agnosticism as to the precise date of the dialogue seems prudent. Socrates only claims to have demonstrated one thing in the *Cratylus*, that names are unreliable; elsewhere in the dialogue he mentions important issues only to postpone discussion (the denial of the possibility of false speaking) or to leave us wanting more (the refutation of Protagoras), and at the close he leaves us in aporia. There is nothing in the argument of the dialogue upon which one can base a more precise dating, and given the aporetic, teasing aspects of the dialogue that is not surprising. Furthermore, the relationship of names to things is in itself an appropriate subject for Plato to tackle at any point in his philosophical career. In this book I shall not be directly concerned with the dating problem; I have nothing concrete to add to the debate, and the question of the precise dating of the *Cratylus* is, in my view, quite simply not one of the most interesting problems raised by the dialogue.

In what follows I will outline the plan of this study, beginning with some definitions. I will refer to theories of naming, and to names as opposed to words because this best reflects Plato’s use of ὄνομα to refer to all kinds of words.¹¹

⁹ 429d1-8.

¹⁰ See H. Thesleff, *Studies in Platonic Chronology*, Societas Scientiarum Fennica, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 70 (Helsinki, 1982), pp. 167-171, 237; G.R. Ledger, *Re-Counting Plato* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 212-218.

¹¹ Though by 425a1-5 ὀνόματα and ῥήματα are said to make up λόγοι, hinting at a more sophisticated approach. In 2.1 below I will suggest that there is the beginnings of a shift during the course of the dialogue away from concentrating on the correctness of names towards focussing on the correctness of λόγοι.

A natural theory is any theory which claims that names reveal the nature, or 'essence' of their nominata. This is a purposefully vague definition, allowing for a variety of natural theories, including those of Cratylus and Socrates. 'Essence' is also vague; my excuse here is that Plato himself is vague about the exact meaning of οὐσία in the dialogue.¹² A conventional theory of naming is any theory that claims that the property of being a name is conferred by some form of agreement or stipulation, rather than by any descriptive properties a given name might possess; again this is a vague definition, allowing even the names of a private language, whose validity is based on one speaker's convention with himself, to qualify as names of a conventional language.

In Chapter One I will discuss the theories of naming which we are told that Hermogenes and Cratylus hold. Here I shall introduce a distinction between prescriptive and descriptive theories of naming, a distinction that will be crucial to my interpretation of the dialogue. A prescriptive theory of naming lays down the properties that make a name a correct name, whilst a descriptive theory by contrast tries as far as possible to eschew *a priori* considerations about what a name should or should not be in order to qualify as a correct name in favour of drawing conclusions from the names in existing languages. I will argue that both Cratylus and Hermogenes profess theories which in different ways deny this distinction, with unfortunate results.

Both the interlocutors of Socrates will come in for scrutiny. Whilst Cratylus has been the object of controversy in the secondary literature, Hermogenes has been for the most part ignored. I will argue that the latter is much more important to the dialogue than is usually admitted. In this opening chapter I will also suggest ways in which Plato encourages his readers not to be discouraged by the air of *aporia* in the dialogue, but rather to ponder further the problems raised. This he does, I will argue, by careful use of the vocabulary of teaching and learning, listening and examining.

In Chapter Two I will study Socrates' natural theory. I shall argue that Socrates' theory is prescriptive, not descriptive; it is not tied to any particular language, but is a general theory about how naming should be carried out, one which lays down that the true namegiver is guided by the dialectician's insight into the essences of things. In contrast to Cratylus, Socrates makes no claims that Greek names fulfil his prescriptive criteria; he awaits the results of the etymological investigation of names before making any such judgements. In the light of this discussion I shall review criticisms of Socrates' theory, and of ideal languages in general, to see to what extent Plato can be justified in his approach. I will argue that the prescription constitutes as yet the bare sketch of a theory, but one that Plato takes seriously.

¹² This point is made by G. Anagnostopoulos, 'Plato's *Cratylus*: the Two Theories of the Correctness of Names', *Review of Metaphysics* 25 (1971/2), 691-736 (p. 723, n. 34).¹³

In Chapter Three I will continue the assessment of Socrates' theory, using the added detail found in the etymological section. In doing so, I will distinguish between two different etymological methods, the *semantic* and the *mimetic*. The *semantic* method is used by Socrates in the majority of the etymologies to pick out plausible and implausible semantic elements from a name. Thus *Hermogenes* can mean *born of Hermes*. This method allows full rein to Socrates' invention. By the close of the etymological section however we have moved to the *mimetic* method, whereby names reveal essences by imitating them right down to their elements. Few scholars point to the problem in reconciling the meagre store of mimetic values that Socrates puts forward via the latter method with the great number achieved by using the former. I shall use this distinction in comparing the dialogue to more recent species of language investigation, and try to explain more precisely its function in the dialogue.

In the first section I shall contrast both methods to aspects of modern etymology and language study. The *semantic* method has nothing in common, I shall claim, with the techniques of modern etymology. Some scholars have compared the *Cratylus* etymologies to so-called 'static etymology', but they are misinterpreting Plato in the process. Likewise the *mimetic* method should be separated from any form of sound-symbolism. The reason in both cases is that Socrates' primary concern is not with describing Greek usage; in other words, his is a prescriptive theory, whereas modern language studies strive to be descriptive. A closer analogy with the *Cratylus* can be found in examining some seventeenth century examples of language speculation; here I shall suggest that Comenius' *Panglottia* (c.1660) offers an illuminating parallel of a proposed ideal language, where all parts of the language are meaningful down to the letters themselves, allowing names to be definitions of their nominata.

This picture of names as definitions is pursued in the following section, where I try to illuminate why there are two methods of etymology. finally, I shall discuss Plato's attitude towards the practical possibility of producing an ideal language, using parallels with the *Politicus* and the *Phaedrus*.

I will then discuss the etymologies themselves in Chapters Four and five. In Chapter Four I will argue that the etymologies do not parody one person, or merely a few, but constitute an extended attack on a whole host of Greek thinkers and poets, all of whom indulged in some etymologizing to support their beliefs. This habit may appear relatively harmless, especially as Plato himself is not adverse to etymology on occasion. To use etymology as a support for one's ideas however is to go further than that; it is to assume, implicitly, that a given name is natural, i.e., that it gives access to the essence of its nominatum, and that the etymology offered is self-evidently correct, that no alternative etymological explanation is available. Yet the use of etymology in this way begs important questions. Few will want to claim that a whole language consists of natural names, but rather that a certain number are special in this way. Such a claim however demands that one explain, why these names are

special and no others. How did they arise? Can they not be explained differently, to support a different set of ideas? Why do others put forward an alternative set of natural names? To justify any such etymologizing one needs to submit a whole range of names to a critical examination, which is what Plato does. This is one explanation for the etymological section's length and for the heterogeneous nature of the names examined.

The other main reason for the number of etymologies brings us back to their parodic function. The etymologies parody a whole range of Greek thinkers and poets and in so doing offer a schematic survey of the development of Greek thought, from Homer onwards to the Sophists. Plato is attacking a tendency in Greek thought to over-value words; such a frontal assault on Greek culture requires a thorough exposé of bad linguistic habits. The resulting fluxy picture of the world is suspect precisely because it rests on trusting in words rather than the knowledge of a dialectician.

In the concluding part of Chapter Four I put forward some cases where scholars have identified what appear to be Platonic reworkings of the etymologizing of earlier thinkers. This is by way of introduction to Chapter five, where I attempt to show that Plato was doing just that throughout the etymological section. This survey deals in a very broadly chronological way with a succession of Greek thinkers and poets, starting with Homer and culminating with the Sophists. The evidence on which I base my conjectures is, alas, frequently thin, due both to the lack of surviving evidence and also, I will argue, to Plato's parodic style; he is no mere doxographer but borrows creatively from his sources. Despite these difficulties I hope at least to make out a plausible case for my interpretation.

In Chapter Six I deal with the closing section of the dialogue, pages 428 to 440. There are three main problems of interpretation here: firstly, the details of the refutation of Cratylus; secondly, the connection that this refutation bears to the less extreme theories that I have argued Plato is attacking in the etymological section; and thirdly, the interpretation of the final aporia and its relationship to what has gone before. I shall discuss all three areas in turn; two crucial aspects of my interpretation are the importance of Cratylus, especially in the final aporia, and the deliberately unsatisfactory nature of that argument, which acts once again as a challenge to the reader to do better.

In what follows I shall try to offer an explanation as to why Plato wrote the *Cratylus* as he did. Platonic exegesis however is one thing; one is bound to ask whether the *Cratylus* deserves to be regarded as more than a historical curiosity as far as the etymologies go, and a pale shadow of the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist* and the *Republic* in other respects. One cannot claim that it has been neglected,¹³

¹³ A glance at the two hundred items in the bibliography of Derbolav, op. cit., will prove the opposite.

but its peculiar characteristics have denied it a place in the mainstream of Platonic dialogues. Yet the results of an inquiry into the relationship between language and the world, negative though they appear to be, should be of considerable interest. If the dialogue stimulates thought on this topic it can hardly be said to be a museum piece. I shall be in a better position to follow this line of argument up however after I have finished my discussion of the whole work.

CHAPTER ONE

THE THEORIES OF CRATYLUS AND HERMOGENES

The *Cratylus* begins abruptly, even clumsily, with the briefest of interchanges between Cratylus and Hermogenes before the latter launches into a description of their respective theories of the correctness of names, pressing Socrates for his opinions on the matter. It is tempting to think that it is only after Socrates properly enters the fray at 385b, refuting Hermogenes' extreme conventionalism and sketching out his own theory, that the dialogue gets going, and such is a not unreasonable first reaction to reading 383a-385a. In this chapter I shall focus on these opening two pages, arguing that they do in fact form a fitting proemium to the dialogue, foreshadowing many of the difficulties and issues to come. I shall discuss Plato's depiction of Cratylus and Hermogenes; and lastly, I shall have some remarks to make on how Plato encourages the reader to react productively to the problems that are offered by the text.¹

1.1 *The Theory of Cratylus*

Hermogenes (not Cratylus) outlines Cratylus' theory at 383a4-b2 as follows:

- C (1) each of τὰ ὄντα has a natural correctness of name;
- C (2) the name of x is not whatever we have agreed to call it, uttering a piece of speech, rather:
- C (3) there is a natural correctness of names fixed for Greeks and barbarians alike.

¹ This general point is made by various commentators, eg, M.M.A. Mackenzie, 'Putting the *Cratylus* in its Place', *Classical Quarterly* 36 (1986), 124-150, who argues that the dialogue is built around a series of interconnected paradoxes that constitute serious philosophical difficulties and thus provoke further inquiry; J.C. Rijlaarsdam, *Platon über die Sprache, ein Kommentar zum Kratylus* (Utrecht, 1978), p.7: 'Auch im Kratylus überträgt Sokrates keine Kenntnisse, sondern zwingt den Schüler, selbst die Probleme zu lösen'; E. Heitsch, 'Platons Sprachphilosophie im *Kratylus*', *Hermes* 113 (1985), 44-62 (p. 50). In this chapter I will argue that some details of Plato's vocabulary function as an encouragement to the reader to continue the dialectical process.

This is the merest of sketches as yet: each of τὰ ὄντα has a (natural) name, independent of whatever we happen to call it at any given time or place; this (natural) name can be instantiated however (as the names of Cratylus and Socrates testify) in Greek and, in theory, in barbarian languages. Correctness of naming therefore depends on us ensuring that our (empirical) names instantiate this special, as yet unrevealed, relationship between name and thing. It remains unclear however whether Cratylus regards his theory as a descriptive or prescriptive one, that is, does he think Greek and other languages correspond to his model, or is it an ideal to which a proper language would correspond, even if no present ones do? The importance of this distinction will become apparent.

What is clear is that it is a general theory for all languages, not just Greek; therefore we are concerned for the present with the correctness of names in general, not any particular language-specific group of names. Yet this very phrase ‘correctness of names’ is vague. From C (1) we can assume that at the very least there is, or should be, a one-to-one correlation between things and their names in a given language. One is claiming either that in a given language there is one name for each thing in the world (the descriptive option), or that there should be (the prescriptive alternative); we call a spade a spade or at least we should do. Since it is quite plain that many of us do persist in calling things by varying names, the prescriptive option seems the best.² Thus on this view a proper language has one name for each thing. Whether any language fulfils these criteria will then be a matter of empirical investigation.

The precise meaning of φύσει πεφυκῶς remains however obscure; what has been said so far is compatible with a whole range of languages fulfilling these criteria (in which case there would be little need to classify it as a prescriptive ideal at all) or none. Perhaps we all speak, more or less, a proper language, perhaps none of us do. The question to be answered then is how one is to arrive at the ‘natural’ name for each thing. We can rule out immediately taking what is the generally agreed name for x to be the name of x by C (2): the (natural) name of x may coincide with what certain people have ordained to be the name of x, but that fact does not explain the correctness of the name, not even if this coincidence were to be repeated throughout the language, for the correctness or otherwise of naming is not derived from any compact amongst humans. What passes for a ‘name’ can be mere hot air; a (real) name depends for its validity on some as yet unexplained relation between it and the world, which is the same for Greeks and barbarians (as we discover in C (3)). It is this relation that turns what is potentially hot air into meaningful speech, an act of naming.

² One could, admittedly, point to Prodicus as someone who presumably would have argued for the descriptive option. See 5.9 b) below.

A strong version of this thesis might be that a natural language, e.g. Greek, is radically unsound, and therefore all Greeks are more or less uttering hot air as far as the putative ideal language goes. This raises the interesting possibility of two levels of language, one the ordinary discourse of men, full of noise, the other akin to the divine, that instantiates the correctness of names.³ Curious though that seems, Cratylus' rejection of *Hermogenes* as a name for Hermogenes opens up at least the possibility of that path, denying that what we would call a paradigm example of a name is in fact one at all. How can one claim that this name, presumably given by Hermogenes' parents, is not his name?⁴ Furthermore, Socrates begins his reply at 384a8 by addressing Hermogenes as Hermogenes, son of Hipponikos; there is no doubt to whom the name *Hermogenes* refers.

It is worth pausing briefly here. Hermogenes was a follower of Socrates, present indeed at the last;⁵ why then should Socrates use rather formally name and patronymic? The answer is that the addition of the patronymic reinforces the fact that that man does bear the name *Hermogenes* and thereby subtly underlines the paradoxical nature of Cratylus' claim. Contrast the hypothetical case of misidentification at 429e4-5 where the name is wrong but patronymic correct. So what can Cratylus mean when he says that *Hermogenes* is not Hermogenes' name?

At this point one can reintroduce the problem of the meaning of φύσει πεφυκῶαν. *Hermogenes* is not Hermogenes' name because there is not the requisite name-thing connection between it and him; Cratylus rejects the idea that the necessary and sufficient condition for a piece of speech (or its written equivalent) to be a name is that it refers to something consistently for at least most people most of the time. It matters not that people who know Hermogenes know him as *Hermogenes*. Some kind of 'glue' must link name and thing. And this turns out to be the describing of his nature. Since nothing of the semantic analysis of *Hermogenes* seems to fit the man conventionally so named, the name, when applied to that particular man, is just a piece of speech, mere hot air.⁶ Thus Socrates playfully suggests that Cratylus means that Hermogenes is never lucky in his pursuit of wealth.⁷

³ This is anticipating somewhat, but by 391d7-e3 the thesis that the language of the gods is 'natural' is accepted by both Socrates and Hermogenes; cf 400d9.

⁴ Mackenzie, art. cit. pp. 126-127, stresses the paradoxical nature of this claim.

⁵ *Phaedo* 59b7-8.

⁶ The names of Socrates and Cratylus are correct however, why we are not told. Proclus suggests etymologies for both, deriving Κρατύλος 'παρὰ τὸ περικρατῆσαι ἀραρότως τῶν Ἡρακλείτου δογμάτων καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καταφρονῆσαι τῶν ῥευστῶν ὡς μηδὲ κυρίως ὄντων', Σωκράτης 'παρὰ τὸ σωτήρα εἶναι τοῦ κράτους τῆς ψυχῆς, τουτέστι τοῦ λόγου . . .' Proclus *In Crat.* section XVIII (Pasquali).

⁷ 384c3-6. Later, at 407e1-408b7, Ἑρμῆς is derived from τὸ ἐρμηνέα which yields another reason why Hermogenes should not be so-called, namely, that he is poor at producing λόγους.

Names then according to Cratylus can only refer to things by describing them, or rather: if they refer at all, they refer to what they describe.⁸ Note however how this idea is subverted in the very opening lines of the dialogue by Hermogenes' use of demonstrative pronouns, Σωκράτει τῷδε and Κρατύλος ... ὅδε;⁹ the demonstratives function as the linguistic equivalents of pointing at a person, and used with proper names underline the referring function of names. One can refer to someone, be understood as so doing, even if one uses the wrong name, thus there can be wrong attributions of names, just what Cratylus will later deny.¹⁰

What we have seen so far of Cratylus' theory certainly looks like a prescriptive theory, an ideal to be aimed at, a standard by which to measure existing languages. Cratylus however has applied it to Greek by denying that *Hermogenes* is Hermogenes' name, and the *Cratylus* as a whole is to do with Greek as a putative 'natural' language. Cratylus in other words does not recognize the description/prescription distinction: what Greek ought to be is what it (broadly speaking) is. One can see this very clearly later at 436b12-c2, when in answer to Socrates' suggestion that the namegiver might have been mistaken about the nature of reality and hence given incorrect names to things, Cratylus replies that that is impossible, for if the namegiver had not been in a state of knowledge the names would not be names.¹¹ Some names, like *Hermogenes*, will fail the test, but in general he seems confident that Greek easily satisfies the criteria for a natural language.

Cratylus' view seems to be that Greek is fundamentally sound, that the ideal language need not be distinguished from the vernacular, merely that some so-called 'names' like *Hermogenes* are not, thus used, names at all. This requires further explanation. When Socrates asks Cratylus about the name *Hermogenes* later in the dialogue, Cratylus says that *Hermogenes* is the name of someone with the appropriate φύσις;¹² then when Socrates raises the hypothetical case of mistaken identity, Cratylus claims that the person addressing him wrongly would be merely making a noise.¹³ Likewise, to address Hermogenes as *Hermogenes* would presumably be tantamount to using a non-name, as if it is mere hot air *in that context*, though undoubtedly there would be no problem if a true 'son of Hermes' were being addressed. Names, in the abstract, refer to the natures they reveal; if used wrongly, however, they become non-names.

⁸ This is confirmed by Cratylus himself at 429c3-4.

⁹ 383a1, 4. For the use of demonstratives elsewhere see 407e4, 427d2, 428a5, 429b12, e7, 440e5.

¹⁰ 429b1ff.

¹¹ See also 438c1-4, where Cratylus is reduced to claiming that the provenance of Greek name was some god.

¹² 429c3-4.

¹³ 430a4-5.

Instead of wholesale rejection of certain names however one might posit two classes of names, one comprising correct names, the other incorrect ones, which nevertheless, *pace* Cratylus, still function as names. This is just what Socrates does when he introduces, courtesy of Homer, a distinction between divine and human names. The gods call things by their true names; the names men use implicitly fall short of that ideal.¹⁴ It is not hard to see that the gods-man distinction is merely the prescriptive-descriptive one in another guise; but whilst Cratylus seems happy to ignore any such distinction, Socrates retreats from early apparent optimism about the possibilities of discovering the prescriptive ideal of language instantiated in Greek,¹⁵ to a careful drawing of distinctions between the human realm and the divine,¹⁶ attributing perfect sophistry to Hades for example,¹⁷ and implying that to be a true διαλεκτικός one must be a semi-divine hero.¹⁸ The language we should all be speaking is only possible to those with at least some divine blood in them. For the rest, it is a case of relying on νόμος.¹⁹

This gods-man divide then looks forward to the final aporia where it is transformed: if human language is flux-ridden and cannot be reduced to a coherent sense, the prescriptive ideal must be moved elsewhere; but a divine language that could name Forms is literally unspeakable.²⁰ The prescriptive-descriptive distinction, or better perhaps the investigation of the foundations of a proper philosophical language, thus pervades the dialogue, making it in a sense a meditation on the limits of language, moving from the optimism underlining Cratylus' theory to the aporetic finale, where pure noise faces ineffable truth.

By that time the damage that Cratylus' theory can do is apparent. If what a name should be is what a name is then every name is a perfect picture, via etymological analysis, of its nominatum; but if a name is a perfect picture of its nominatum, knowledge of it alone suffices for knowledge of that nominatum.²¹ If, however, names turn out to be less reliable than one had hoped, one risks being terribly deceived as to the nature of things. Thus when the etymological

¹⁴ 391d7ff, cf 400d6-401a5, where the contrast is made more explicitly.

¹⁵ Thus at 397b7-c2 he seems happy enough about the idea that some names may have been given by a superhuman power.

¹⁶ 400d6-401a5; cf 407d6-7, 408d4-5.

¹⁷ 403e4.

¹⁸ 398c6-e3. Note that the etymology of ἄνθρωπος follows, the bottom of this scale of descending cognitive achievement.

¹⁹ 400e1-401a1, cf 401b1.

²⁰ The assumption that these are separated Forms is contested by Irwin, 'Plato's Heracliteanism', *Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1977), 1-13 (p. 2), who argues that they are no different ontologically from the stable natures of 386d8-e4, 389a5ff. Irwin's interpretation is possible, but why does Socrates 'dream' about these stable beings when he had no difficulty in discussing the others earlier? See further the discussion in 6.5 below.

²¹ Hence Cratylus' claim at 435d4-6.

experiment is tried, names reveal (broadly speaking) a Heraclitean picture of the world; since they, *ex hypothesi*, reveal the nature of things, moderate flux prevails. Socrates however, by demonstrating a more Eleatic picture emerging from selected names, thereby reveals the fluxy nature of names themselves.

This has dire consequences: if language too is infected with flux it cannot reveal any essences at all, and so, *ex hypothesi*, our world is best described as being in a state of radical flux; yet it was on the basis of stable οὐσίαι that Socrates at least built his theory in the first place. If philosophy is to survive, names must name stable essences.²² Hence the Forms; but a language that could be used for them cannot have any of these fluxy human characteristics and so human language is cut off completely from truth.

This uncomfortable thought demonstrates that the final aporia is foreshadowed on the very first page of the dialogue. At the same time one might well feel that there must be an alternative avoiding this unpleasant dilemma, a feeling that will spur one on to reflect critically on what one has read. And that, I contend, is just the reaction Plato would have desired.

Another later problem foreshadowed is Cratylus' explicit denial of the possibility of falsity.²³ If language is comprised of names that are perfect pictures then unless a name perfectly reveals the essence of the nominatum it is not a proper name (of that thing) and is at best a name of something else. Look at 384a3-4: if Cratylus wished to say clearly what he was thinking about he could make Hermogenes ὁμολογεῖν καὶ λέγειν ἅπερ αὐτὸς λέγει. In the lexicon one finds λέγειν meaning firstly to pick up, gather; then to count, tell; next to recount, tell over; and only then say, to speak. There is here the idea of picking out things in the world. Implicit in Cratylus' theory is the belief that when one uses a name, either one picks out the desired nominatum, or one does not (a 'hatpeg' model of how names refer to things); in addition, if one succeeds in referring to it then one has access to its essence. And so if one were to disagree with Cratylus one would be talking about something else. If one were to use *Hermogenes* to refer to the interlocutor of Socrates and Cratylus in this dialogue and made statements about him, Cratylus would deny that these were about (the true referent of) *Hermogenes* at all. *Hermogenes* refers to the man who possesses the appropriate essence. Cratylus would say that if two people are to λέγειν, pick out and talk about anything, they must necessarily either ὁμολογεῖν, pick out the same thing and talk about it, or talk about different things entirely. One cannot have any dialectic on this way of looking at the world. Socrates by contrast will have less stringent demands on what a name should do. So long as a name preserves the τύπος of the thing then it is entitled

²² Cf *Parmenides* 135b5-c3.

²³ 429d4-6.

to be regarded as a proper name.²⁴ This in turn reflects an awareness of the difference between a prescriptive and a descriptive theory, accepting that, ideally, names should as far as possible reflect essences,²⁵ but aware that for a variety of reasons they do not meet the ideal.

Of course, none of this is obvious on first reading; only on rereading the dialogue do the ramifications of Cratylus' theory become clearer. At the same time, the care with which the opening has been written becomes more apparent. No real dialectic has taken place between Cratylus and Hermogenes; they have merely stated their positions and reached an impasse. The reason is simple. Cratylus' beliefs about language (and those of Hermogenes, as will be seen) destroy the possibility of dialectic; they cannot go beyond stating and restating their beliefs before lapsing into silence. One can imagine the frustrated Hermogenes, eager to restart the exchange of opinions,²⁶ leaping at the opportunity to introduce Socrates into the discussion. The abruptness of the opening is well-motivated: it matches the abrupt manner in which dialectic is restarted.

By contrast Cratylus is no conversationalist. He refuses to make anything clear,²⁷ and takes up an ironic pose, pretending to meditate upon something or other. If he wished, he could make Hermogenes agree and say the same about the subject of his meditation; but, it seems, he has no intention of doing so. There are two points to mention here. firstly, note again the care with which the opening is written. On re-reading, the skill with which Plato differentiates the two interlocutors of Socrates becomes apparent, the one eager for conversation, the other silent and enigmatic to the point of arrogance.

Secondly, the description of Cratylus seems to be intended as a parody of Socratic teaching and behaviour: Socratic irony is of course very famous, not to say notorious,²⁸ and Socrates in the *Symposium* is pictured meditating to himself for long periods.²⁹ A hostile view of Socrates might be that he never makes himself clear, for all his demands for clarity from others, and that by verbal trickery he forces his hapless interlocutors to agree with him (Cratylus of course being an exception). It is as though the reader is pointed to a superficial similarity between Cratylus and Socrates, to be reinforced by Socrates' apparent approval of Cratylus' theory at 390d7-e4; on reflection the similarity is only superficial.

²⁴ 432e5-7.

²⁵ 435c2-3.

²⁶ Hermogenes' eagerness to listen to other people's opinions is important; see 1.3 below.

²⁷ Cf 427d3-7.

²⁸ Thus Burnet's note on *Apology* 38a1: 'The words ἔρων, εἰρωνεία, εἰρωνεύομαι are only used of Socrates by his opponents, and have always an unfavourable meaning. The ἔρων is the man who shirks responsibility by sly excuses (such as the Socratic profession of ignorance) ...' (*Plato, Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates and Crito*, edited with notes by J. Burnet (Oxford, 1924).

²⁹ 174d4-175c6; 220c3-d5.

Yet what does Socrates see in the theory to recommend it? It is important to remember that if one makes the appropriate distinctions there is the basis of a theory of which Plato could approve. This can be illustrated by looking at C (3) for a moment and the reference to Greeks and barbarians. It is easy to miss how shocked most of Plato's countrymen would have been at the idea that barbarian languages could be just as good as (or even rather better than) Greek at fulfilling the vital task of revealing the nature of things. The shift of attention towards what is objective is something that Plato would admire and we will see the reference to the Greeks and barbarians repeated. Cratylus' ambiguous relationship to Socrates in terms of their theories is thus a puzzle that needs to be sorted out, but one the resolution of which Plato leaves to the reader.³⁰

Thus the first page of the dialogue reveals Cratylus' theory to be potentially a disastrous one that destroys the possibility of dialectic. Once one returns to the beginning having read through the dialogue one sees fully how the later problems are foreshadowed here; one also appreciates more fully how what appears to be incidental scene-setting in fact reinforces the 'argument proper'.

1.2 *Socrates and Learning from Names*

Replying to Hermogenes' request for his opinion on the correctness of names Socrates declares that this is no easy matter. He himself has not mastered the subject, not having attended Prodicus' 50 drachmai lecture or lectures.³¹ Nevertheless he will join the others in considering it. Unsurprisingly in view of what I have said above, these remarks are full of hints and allusions to things to come. Thus note Socrates' emphasis on a shared investigation of the problem of the correctness of names. Both συζητεῖν μέντοι ἔτοιμός εἰμι καὶ σοὶ καὶ Κρατύλῳ κοινῇ,³² and εἰς τὸ κοινὸν δὲ καταθέντας χρὴ σκοπεῖν³³ pick up the opening words of the dialogue where Hermogenes asks Cratylus whether he wants to ἀνακοινοῦσθαι τὸν λόγον. Socrates' reply, sandwiched between the sketches of first Cratylus' then Hermogenes' theories, contains no hint of a theory as yet, merely an intention to do the best he can with the

³⁰ One could also add that this is a sign of Plato's ambiguous relationship to these two erstwhile 'teachers'. The false and the true teacher?

³¹ There is some doubt as to whether one lecture or a series is intended. Guthrie argues that just one lecture is meant on the grounds that the expression used is πεντηκοντάδραχμος ἐπίδειξις, and the sum of fifty drachmai is too small for a course of lectures given what we know from elsewhere of the sums that sophists charged. (W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, six volumes (Cambridge, 1962-1981), iii, p. 42, note 1.)

³² 384c2-3.

³³ 384c7.

combined talents of the three of them. Cratylus and Hermogenes at present are talking at cross purposes; Socrates will attempt to get them talking productively again.

It is also important to add that if the debate on the correctness of names is to be truly something shared, it involves us, the readers, as well. Socrates puts εἰς τὸ κοινόν the materials for us to carry on the debate; he thereby challenges us to find a better theory and a way out of the aporias that he presents. Again the careful detail of the opening of the dialogue becomes evident, as seemingly innocuous phrases suddenly stand out on a second or third reading.

An important example of this is the vocabulary of teaching and learning, which crops up at various points throughout the dialogue, the first occasion being Socrates' reference to Prodicus teaching on this very subject of the correctness of names. References to teaching and learning are common in other dialogues; a comparison with the *Protagoras* for example reveals μανθάνειν, διδάσκειν and their derivatives occurring even more frequently. Here however the whole question of how one learns and teaches people takes on greater significance when the means of teaching and learning, the Greek language, becomes the object which one learns and teaches. Thus note that there is a concentration of these words in 391-2 where the possibility of learning through language has just been put on a sound theoretical footing and Socrates looks at Homer, the foundation of Greek education. Earlier Socrates is at pains to emphasise the educative function of names.³⁴

Then at the end of the etymological section where we have perhaps learnt from names Hermogenes asks Cratylus whether he has learnt anything from the etymologies, or whether he can teach Socrates and him anything. Cratylus echoes Socrates' first words, claiming that this is not a matter for easy learning or teaching, ironically in view of what we have just read, where it seems as though learning from names is rather straightforward. Socrates then takes up the theme, praising Cratylus as someone who has investigated the subject and learnt about it from others, and asks to be made one of his pupils, which Cratylus says he might indeed do. The irony and humour of the passage is obvious, but it has a very serious point, that of telling us to think again: did we really learn anything from the etymologies? Can we learn from names? In the final pages of the dialogue this issue is confronted head-on: 435d4, e7; 438a8, b3,7; then 439a6,7, b4,7. Finally note that right at the end of the dialogue Socrates asks Cratylus to teach him if he finds out anything new (440e3). In the context of the final aporia this has a special force, for we seem to be left unable to communicate the truth at all, whether Cratylus is right or Socrates. Again the opening of the dialogue introduces a theme that will resonate throughout.

³⁴ 388b10ff.

1.3 *Hermogenes and his Theory*

Commentators have not felt there is any real problem with Hermogenes, by contrast to Cratylus. We have a few references to him elsewhere: he was with Socrates at the last according to *Phaedo* 59b7-8; Xenophon says that he was one of inner Socratic circle and that he was an authority on the trial of Socrates.³⁵ Diogenes says that he was an Eleatic,³⁶ but that seems certain to be some inference from the *Cratylus* itself. Commentators have focussed instead on the more serious opponent Cratylus, for Hermogenes holds, or is forced into holding,³⁷ a ridiculous theory that is quickly refuted and spends much of the dialogue as Socrates' compliant and uncritical interlocutor during the etymologies, before lapsing into silence.

Rijlaarsdam has argued for a more generous view of Hermogenes.³⁸ She claims that he holds the view that names have no etymologies, no original true meaning, they are merely 'Lautkomplexe, deren Bedeutung verabredet worden ist.'³⁹ His apparent vacillation between two theories of conventionalism can be readily explained, and his performance in the etymological section should be seen in the light of someone who is eager to hear Socrates' own opinions,⁴⁰ not pronounce half-baked answers himself. Quick-witted and cheerful, he is the ideal interlocutor for Socrates in the etymological section.

I am in full accord with the attempt to rehabilitate the reputation of Hermogenes, though not with all the details of Rijlaarsdam's interpretation. Without anticipating too much, it is important to see that Hermogenes is a lover of opinions. Thus at 384a4-7 he is eager to hear Socrates' opinion on Cratylus' oracular utterances or even more his own opinions about the correctness of names, and when sketching his own theory he says what δοκεῖ to him, but is happy to learn and hear not only from Cratylus but from anyone whomsoever.⁴¹ It is no coincidence then that at 385a3 and b1 his reply to Socrates is ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ, nor that Cratylus' first words to him are Εἰ σοι δοκεῖ. Hermogenes, as he himself says, is prepared to listen to anyone and so is full

³⁵ *Memorabilia* i, 2, 48; iv, 8, 4. He is also mentioned at ii, 10.

³⁶ D.L. iii, 6.

³⁷ The view of Heitsch, op. cit., and J. Gosling, *Plato* (London, 1973). 200-206.

³⁸ See op. cit. pp. 5-7, 38-51, 105-6, 154-5.

³⁹ op. cit. p. 38.

⁴⁰ Cf 384a4-7.

⁴¹ 384d8-e2.

of opinions. He is the ideal interlocutor for Socrates in the etymological section because he is keen to hear all the strange opinions that emerge there, indeed, as I shall try to demonstrate, he directs the course of much of the investigation. Though in no way an original thinker, he is then by no means stupid, but someone who plays with ideas, even if he is unable necessarily to justify them. Seen in this light, Hermogenes' contribution to the dialogue becomes much more central.

Hermogenes declares that he has often discussed the correctness of names with Cratylus and many others but cannot be persuaded that his theory is wrong. This is interesting: he and Cratylus have had this unilluminating discussion before. We shall soon see that the reason why he cannot be persuaded that he is wrong is that he, like Cratylus, has a theory of language that rules out productive discussion. To be persuaded that a theory is wrong and another one is right one has to accept the possibility of error, of using language incorrectly, misdescribing a situation and so forth. This Hermogenes does not do. First of all he claims:

H (1) the correctness of names rests on συνθήκη καὶ ὁμολογία.

If it is agreed to call x F , F is its name. This looks straightforward enough. A name's correctness derives not from any descriptive qualities it may have vis-a-vis its nominatum, but simply from the fact that it is agreed that F should be the name of x . This is consistent with a weak reading of C (1): if we reach sensible agreement over nomenclature there is no reason in theory why each thing that needs naming cannot have its very own name. A name might coincidentally have descriptive properties as well, but that is not what makes it a correct name, rather an agreement of some sort that it is the name for x , just the reverse of Cratylus' theory above.

The nature of the agreement involved remains unclear. One can think of various possible answers to this puzzle: the ancient equivalent of the Académie Française, a democratic decision, or perhaps some kind of linguistic variant of the principle of the survival of the fittest is to be assumed, the agreement referring to the (virtually) unconscious 'approval' given to the names that have come into common use. Hermogenes however has a stronger thesis:

H (2) whatsoever someone (τις) decides to call x , is the name of x .

This thesis does not merely apply to an initial baptism which thenceforward fixes the name; if I name x F then rebaptize it G , F is replaced by G as the name of x so long as I care to call it by that name.

This is a Humpty Dumpty theory of names. In Chapter 6 of *Through the Looking Glass* there is the following exchange between Humpty Dumpty and Alice: "I don't know what you mean by 'glory'," Alice said. Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant 'there's

a nice knock-down argument for you!’ ” “But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knock-down argument’,” Alice objected. “When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.” “The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.” “The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.” ⁴² Hermogenes indeed claims to be the master of the names he uses: recall the analogy he draws at 384d3-5 between our freedom to change our slaves’ names at will and our freedom with regard to the rest of the language.⁴³

He then adds a polemical flourish:

- H (3) no name is the name of anything by nature (φύσει... πεφυκέναι, picking up φύσει πεφυκυῖαν earlier), but by *nomos* and the custom of those accustomed to call things by various names.

Hermogenes here reverts to a more moderate version of conventionalism, for the reference to the customs of men (he switches to the plural) cannot be equivalent to arbitrary changing of names by individuals as H (2) suggests. Now it is curious why Hermogenes should set two different theories like this side by side and apparently show no awareness that they are not equivalent; one allows for the fact that language is a social thing designed primarily to communicate ideas and information, which therefore needs agreed names, the other treats language literally as one’s slave, one’s personal property that one may do with as one pleases.

Socrates is quite aware of the different theories that Hermogenes is offering, thus he asks Hermogenes whether this freedom of namegiving applies to individuals as well as to cities. Hermogenes replies that it does. A little later, at 385d2-e3, Hermogenes reaffirms his commitment to H (2) in its extreme, Humpty Dumpty form. Here he adduces some evidence for his view, namely that even Greek cities differ in their names for things, let alone barbarians and Greeks. This reference to Greeks and barbarians recalls Cratylus’ theory and underlines the parallelism between them.

This ‘evidence’ however that Hermogenes adduces will not suffice to support his view of H (2), but only a much weaker thesis. And it does nothing to undermine the unexceptionable part of the natural theory that the *nominanda* are stable things in the world that can be picked out and named. Hermogenes

⁴² Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, edited by Martin Gardner, revised edition (Harmondsworth, 1970), pp. 268-269.

⁴³ Cf the anecdote about how Diodorus Cronus used to call his slaves μέν, δέ, etc, in K. Döring, *Die Megariker: Kommentierte Sammlung der Testimonien* (Amsterdam, 1972) fr. 114-115. The point was that since all names are merely the results of some convention or other, these names were as good as any supposedly natural names.

implicitly admits as much by remarking that different names are used ἐπὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς. What then is Hermogenes playing at? Three alternatives seem possible:

- (a) he is merely confused;
- (b) Plato has forced the extreme version H (2) on him, and what he really intends is a combination of H (1) and H (3);
- (c) he has some argument or other in mind that denies the distinction between individual acts of baptism and communally-sanctioned names.

On the principle of exegetical charity it seems best to avoid arguing for (a) if possible; (b) certainly has its proponents, eg Heitsch and Gosling, but Hermogenes is confident enough agreeing to H (2); it does not look as if Socrates has pulled the wool over his eyes. So (c) needs to be examined.

Rijlaarsdam argues that Hermogenes' conventionalism amounts to a claim that names, being totally reliant on agreement, have no etymological true meanings at all (though she admits that there are no convincing arguments offered for this); and so, if all names are the result of agreement and are not in any way 'pictures' of their *nominata*, there is no difference between the moderate and extreme theses, because any name is as good a name as any other. There are as many names of a thing as dialects, languages etc. If one were to argue that a name that is understood by no-one else is no name, Hermogenes could ask how many people have to understand a name for it to be a name? Two? Twenty?⁴⁴

This interpretation is attractive; less plausible is the initial claim that Hermogenes argues that there are no true etymological meanings of names. It is better to credit Hermogenes with a theory that precisely inverts that of Cratylus, as follows: one can use descriptive names for slaves, other people, things etc, but that is not what makes them names, rather the use of a sound or sounds to refer to something; there is nothing 'natural' about any particular sound or sounds that 'glues' it for evermore to a *nominatum*. Given this, we are free to change them whenever we feel it is fit so to do. The correctness of name F for x lies in the agreement of the users of F to use it in that context, however many they be—hence the use of the plural in H (3) and (implicitly) H (1)—even if there is only one user, as in H (2).

Rijlaarsdam is right however to point to the difficulty in demonstrating that a name is not a name merely because it is used by too few people. Indeed if one tried to argue too rigidly along those lines trouble would come over

⁴⁴ op. cit., pp. 38-51.

accommodating any new baptisms at all, eg, to take a modern example, of newly discovered elements. Or take the hypothetical case of the last remaining speaker of a particular language: does the fact that no-one can understand him anymore disqualify the sounds he utters from being names? These arguments that Hermogenes could draw upon are not watertight, but they do have the kind of superficial plausibility that would attract him. And now just as according to Cratylus' theory any number of names for things might be agreed upon by the speakers of a given language without that agreement becoming relevant to the correctness of those names, so here the descriptive qualities of a name have no bearing on whether or not it is a name of a particular thing. This then saves Hermogenes from the awkwardness that attends Rijlaarsdam's interpretation of defending the proposition that there are no etymological meanings at all, not even amongst onomatopoeic names; he can allow that onomatopoeic names have a descriptive content whilst still claiming that that is not what makes them names; barbarians probably have very different names for the same things.

Is this a convention theory however? Anagnostopoulos points to 434e5-435a10, where Socrates briefly discusses how names function 'conventionally'. When I say something like σκληρόν, I assign a certain meaning to it in my mind, in this case, *hard*, and you recognize that I intend that meaning; but in order for this δῆλωμα to take place, you must make a convention with yourself to understand σκληρόν as *hardness*, since, as has been shown, it contains both mimetically appropriate and inappropriate letters. Hermogenes' extreme theory is consistent with the second part of this process, for it allows one to establish any such convention, perhaps in opposition to the established version.⁴⁵ Given the context and aids like pointing at the thing named, perhaps it will fit the first part too: if a large quadruped stands in front of us and I refer to it as a *horse* and you call it a *man* I will know to what you are referring (even if I think you are a little odd or misinformed).

We have then a neat parallel theory to the extreme natural doctrine of Cratylus. Both render dialectic impossible, Hermogenes by allowing one to change the rules of the game as it were whenever one wishes by rebaptizing things, Cratylus by refusing to give human baptism its due; the language of (real) names has some sort of existence even if no man ever uses them. Thus both have theories that are in a sense philosophical ideals, and both apply these ideals indiscriminately to ordinary language.

At the point at which Socrates enters the fray Hermogenes and Cratylus are unable to communicate and dialectic cannot get started. By the end we have moved on only to be stopped in our tracks by another aporia. This melancholy situation however is only one side of the coin. Just as Socrates restarted

⁴⁵ G. Anagnostopoulos, 'Plato's *Cratylus* : the Two Theories of the Correctness of Names', *Review of Metaphysics*, 25 (1971/2), 691-736 (p.701).

dialectic before, so too we the readers of the dialogue can refuse to rest content with this state of affairs. Enough material has been given to us to try to make a better theory, and the encouraging remarks of Socrates to Cratylus at the end of the dialogue are surely addressed to us as well. And if we do not make progress a sorry situation is at hand. As remarked on above, if human names are indeed useless, how can reading philosophical dialogues help us, unless it is perhaps a case of throwing away the ladder up which we have just climbed?

In the next section I have more to say on how Plato encourages the reader to react positively to the problems that emerge during the course of the dialogue. To review the two positions outlined so far, both are extreme theories but both have the seeds of better theories within them. If Cratylus were to embrace a measure of convention in the form of recognizing the distinction between ordinary language and the ideal and that between referring and describing via names, and Hermogenes were to accept that naming is not just a case of individual baptizing of things, they could at least talk to each other with some effect.

1.4 *More Hints to the Reader*

Here I shall continue along the lines of 1.2 above, where I remarked on the frequency with which teaching and learning are mentioned, and how this is designed to focus our attention on the issue of how names can be ‘teaching tools’. This brings me on to another connected matter. In the opening of the dialogue ἀκούειν is used repeatedly,⁴⁶ both by Hermogenes and Socrates, who admits he has not heard Prodicus’ 50 drachmai lecture⁴⁷ on the subject of the correctness of names. The latter reference is surely ironic, yet hinting at an important truth: learning is not merely a case of listening, just as we shall discover that knowledge is not to be found prepackaged in names. Learning is not just a passive activity. Thus at 385a1-2 Socrates says let us examine (σκεψώμεθα) this thesis, to see if it stands up to scrutiny. Turning to 440d3-6 the point is made even more forcibly: σκοπεῖσθαι οὖν χρὴ ἀνδρείως τε καὶ εὖ, καὶ μὴ ῥαδίως ἀποδέχεσθαι—ἔτι γὰρ νέος εἰ καὶ ἡλικίαν ἔχεις—σκεψάμενον δέ, ἐὰν εὖρης, μεταδιδόναι καὶ ἑμοί. The σκοπεῖν / σκοπεῖσθαι vocabulary used in these final interchanges between Socrates and Cratylus suggests mental exertion rather than passive acceptance of other men’s views (which is what trying to learn from language has turned out to be even at best, the taking up of other men’s opinions, be they Homer’s or whoever). This then marks some kind of shift from the opening: there the

⁴⁶ 384a5, b3, 4, 6, e1.

⁴⁷ See note 31 above.

accent was on this passive process of ‘soaking up’ knowledge, now it is of the active investigation of things. Having been supplied with an example of such an investigation in the person of Socrates we the readers should go off to do the same ourselves.

This dichotomy between passive listening and active investigating repays further attention. As far as the former is concerned, an interesting example occurs at 396b3ff, where Socrates remarks that the name Κρόνος might mislead someone on first hearing (ἀκούσαντι ἐξαίφνης, b4); in other words, one must reflect on what one hears, not just passively accept it. Even more striking is the discussion of δίκαιον, where ἀκούειν crops up several times.⁴⁸ Here the emphasis is on Socrates hearing one story after another about what precisely ‘going through’ refers to, with the result that he is even more confused than he was before. If you just listen and do not think that is not surprising. The use here of μανθάνειν then recalls my earlier discussion of how one can learn (or understand) from hearing names. Looking back to the beginning of the dialogue, how can one learn from listening to Prodicus? Or anybody?

Hermogenes makes an observation to the effect that Socrates seems to have heard these (sc. etymologies?) from someone and not made them up. Socrates replies: listen, and perhaps I shall deceive you into thinking that I have not heard the rest somewhere else too. This is the one occasion that Socrates uses ἄκουε to resume the train of argument; very commonly he uses the σκόπει, σκεψώμεθα vocabulary. One can read this as saying: just listen and I can deceive you, by contrast to the usual injunction to examine what follows. This then emphasises the problems of passive listening. It also suggests that the rest of the material too is not wholly Plato’s invention but is at least based upon what contemporary thinkers were saying. Hermogenes, though someone interested in opinions, has been blinded by Socrates’ verbal fireworks into thinking this is all Socrates’ work.

One might object that the use of the ‘active’ vocabulary of σκέπτομαι, σκοπεῖν and its cognates is very common in Plato, especially as a way of resuming the train of argument, and carries no loaded meaning. It is indeed common; but the *Cratylus* is very rich in examples, and, as with the point about learning from names, there is a special force in being encouraged to consider, say, Justice, when what we are considering is *justice* the name, which, *ex hypothesi*, should reveal the essence of the nominatum.

In fact, Socrates’ call to scrutinize the course of the argument is a *leitmotiv* of the dialogue, beginning with his very first speeches.⁴⁹ After he has outlined his basic theory he emphasises that the results are provisional, the outcome of their σκέψις which must continue if they are to find the precise nature of the

⁴⁸ 412c6-413d2.

⁴⁹ 384c7, 385a1.

correctness of names.⁵⁰ Later we are told that the man who knows about names considers their *δυνάμεις* as the doctor considers the *δυνάμεις* of drugs;⁵¹ this then points the way for the etymological section where Socrates and Hermogenes are to do just that. Then at 401a2-5 Socrates emphasises that it is men's beliefs that are being investigated, not those of the gods. Finally when Socrates introduces the Forms at the close of the dialogue, leaving the arena of names and men's opinions behind, again he uses *σκέψαι* at 439c6, *σκεψώμεθα* at d3. This exhortation to scrutinize the argument is maintained to the end,⁵² by which time attention has switched from names to things, thereby reinforcing the idea of an investigation shared between Plato and the reader. The movement in the text from passive hearing to active investigation constitutes a challenge to us to move from the passive act of reading to active reflection on what we have read.

Finally in this chapter I will discuss one more example of a loaded phrase. At 440d5 Socrates, having exhorted Cratylus to ponder the problems thrown up by the final aporia, remarks *ἔτι γὰρ νέος εἶ καὶ ἡλικίαν ἔχεις*. There is a close parallel to this in *Parmenides*, 130e1-4, where Parmenides says to Socrates *Νέος γὰρ εἶ ἔτι ... ὦ Σώκρατες, καὶ οὐπω σου ἀντειληπταί φιλοσοφία ὥς ἔτι ἀντιλήψεται κατ' ἐμὴν δόξαν, ὅτε οὐδὲν αὐτῶν ἀτιμάσεις· νῦν δὲ ἔτι πρὸς ἀνθρώπων ἀποβλέπεις δόξας διὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν*. Not only are the two passages verbally similar, but in each case we see a younger man confidently supporting a theory to which difficulties are raised by an older and wiser companion that he is unable to answer.

In this connection *ἡλικία* is an interesting word to use. The other occasion it is used in this dialogue is at 429d7-8 when Socrates declines to enter into discussion about the problem of false speech, saying that it is too ingenious a *logos* for him at his age. *ἡλικία* commonly means 'prime of life', and in Platonic dialogues this often amounts to the age at which one is ready for the demands of philosophy. Thus in the *Euthydemus* 306d5-6 Kritoboulos is said to be in his prime and to need someone who will benefit him; in the *Laches* at 187c8-d1 there is a reference to the time to be educated and in the *Lysis* the same idea appears at 209a4,7,c3; the idea is important too in the *Symposium*, 206c3 and 209b2, where the *ἡλικία* is the time when one is 'pregnant' in the philosophical sense. In the *Theaetetus* 142d1-3 Socrates is reported as having said that Theaetetus would be *ἐλλόγιμον* if he lived into his prime; the dialogue shows Theaetetus before his prime gaining valuable experience in philosophy, and implicitly looks forward to his later achievements. Then by contrast in the *Gorgias* Callicles declares that philosophy is fine *ἐν τῇ ἡλικίᾳ*

⁵⁰ 391a4-b7.

⁵¹ 394a7-b6.

⁵² 440d3-4, 5, 8.

but no further (484c5-7, 485a4ff). References to Socrates and others being past that ἡλικία are also easy to find: in the *Euthydemus* Kriton asks Socrates whether he is not afraid that he is too old to indulge in verbal joustings with Euthydemus and his brother (272b5-6); in the *Theaetetus* at 146b3-4 Theodorus excuses himself from answering Socrates' questions on the grounds that he is not used to such discussions and is too old to get used to them now; and at 149c2, in the midst of the midwife passage, midwives are said to be those who are too old to bear children any longer (cf *Republic* 461b5). Implicitly Socrates is past the age of conceiving and bearing forth philosophical ideas.

The above gives an idea of the deeper resonances that this innocent-looking phrase at the end of the *Cratylus* might have to Plato's readers. It seems plausible to suggest that the use here of ἡλικία would function as a hint that the aporia is not the final word: Cratylus is at the right age for philosophy, for sorting out where his enthusiasm has taken him astray, and so—if they have understood the dialogue—are Plato's readers. The injunctions to σκοπεῖσθαι (440d3-4, cf d5,8) and ἐννοεῖν (440e7) then function as encouragements to study afresh the arguments of the dialogue; and Socrates' encouraging Cratylus to go off to the country recalls the first line of the *Theaetetus*.⁵³ The end of the *Cratylus* is thus a new beginning, if one but takes the hint.

The *Cratylus* thus invites us to solve difficult problems as best we can, using what materials are to hand in the dialogue. In these respects it has affinities with the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus*, without matching either the complexity of the former's aporiai or the richness of the latter's philosophical insights. The problems it raises are not necessarily insoluble, but they are tricky, and go to the root of the idea of talking about timeless things and the whole question of the nature of the relation between names and the things they name.

There is another aspect of this seemingly innocent phrase that I wish to dwell on however. ἡλικίαν ἔχειν is used, it appears, of people who have the time and ability to make philosophical progress, one way or another; Socrates is too old to develop philosophically, at least in his conception of the right methods and goals of philosophy, but Cratylus, Theaetetus and the youthful Socrates of the *Parmenides* are not. If this interpretation is correct, Cratylus is to say the least not old. The importance of this innocent-looking observation will emerge from a consideration of the 'problem of Cratylus'.

1.5 The Problem of Cratylus

I have already discussed the portrayal of Hermogenes, arguing that his importance in the dialogue has been overlooked in the secondary literature. By

⁵³ *Theaetetus* 142a1.

contrast, much has been written on the 'Problem of Cratylus'. The problem with Cratylus is, in a nutshell, that the Cratylus of the *Cratylus* seems irreconcilable with the Cratylus of Aristotle. The latter refers to him on three occasions: once in the *Rhetoric*, where he reports Aeschines as saying that Cratylus used to hiss and wave his hands around whilst speaking,⁵⁴ and twice in the *Metaphysics*.⁵⁵ The first passage is Aristotle's account of Plato's development, according to which Plato as a young man was a pupil of Cratylus, from whom he took the flux theory as far as it concerned sensibles, and in the second Aristotle reports that Cratylus ended up by believing that he should not speak at all, and only moved his finger; in addition he criticized Heraclitus' dictum that one could not step into the same river twice, arguing that one could not even step in it once.

There is nothing here about a belief in the correctness of names or an interest in etymology, yet Cratylus is credited with these in the dialogue.⁵⁶ Indeed it is Socrates who introduces the subject of flux,⁵⁷ though Cratylus declares his allegiance to the flux doctrine at the end of the dialogue.⁵⁸ The problem is how one is to reconcile the tradition that Cratylus believed in extreme flux to a theory that stresses the fixity of names, even granted that Heraclitus can be interpreted as believing in some form of a natural theory, so that the Heraclitean Cratylus could argue that he was following in the footsteps of his master.⁵⁹ In addition, the detail that Cratylus was Plato's teacher has worried some commentators, who have found Plato's treatment of his erstwhile master lacking in the appropriate respect.⁶⁰ Looking further afield than the *Cratylus*, the reliability of Aristotle's account of Plato's philosophical development has been doubted;⁶¹ this wider issue will not concern me here.

⁵⁴ *Rhetoric* Γ 16, 1417b1-3. The temptation to connect this to the famous finger-wagging should be resisted: as G.S. Kirk points out ('The Problem of Cratylus', *American Journal of Philology* 72 (1951), 225-253 (p. 244)), we are told that Cratylus did this while talking, not as a substitute for speech.

⁵⁵ *Meta.* A 6, 987a29-b1, and Γ 5, 1010a7-15.

⁵⁶ Cratylus does not come up with any etymologies himself, but he approves wholeheartedly of Socrates' performance at 428b6-c8, and presumably has etymologized Hermogenes' name before condemning it. (This is not to prejudge any of the problems concerning the provenance of the etymologies.)

⁵⁷ 401d4-7, 402a4-c3; 411b3-c6.

⁵⁸ 440d7-e2.

⁵⁹ See DK 22 B 20, 32, 48, 56 with Kahn ad locc. (*The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge, 1979)). These examples of word play / etymology, plus the programmatic statements about listening to the logos (B 1, 50) would give Cratylus enough material to claim a distinguished precedent.

⁶⁰ J. van Ijzeren, 'De Cratylō Heracliteo et de Platonis Cratylō', *Mnemosyne* 49 (1921), 174-200, argues that Plato ridicules his former teacher; others have insisted that Cratylus is treated with respect (see D.J. Allan, 'The Problem of Cratylus', *American Journal of Philology* 75 (1954), 271-287, p. 276, note 3).

⁶¹ E. Weerts, *Platon und der Heraklitismus: ein Beitrag zum Problem der Historie im platonischen Dialog, Philologus*, Supplementband 23, 1 (Leipzig, 1931), pp. 5-29, attacks the Aristotelian

The lack of independent evidence for the beliefs of the historical Cratylus and the uncertainty as to what extent the accounts of Plato and Aristotle are to be regarded as 'historical' rule out firm conclusions here;⁶² that granted, I shall briefly discuss some approaches to this problem. Stenzel tried to resolve the discrepancies between Plato and Aristotle by claiming that the Platonic Cratylus is given various features of a 'typical' fifth century sophist, including an interest in names and etymology; his real concern was with the flux doctrine and his elaboration of it, as reported in Aristotle. Thus in the *Cratylus* he is only interested in etymology and the correctness of names insofar as it supports the flux doctrine, and so when the etymologies of names are also shown to be fluxy, he is not contradicted and can continue to uphold Heracliteanism.⁶³ The problem, as Kirk sees it, lies in reconciling a belief in etymology (and thus the stability of names) with the doctrine of flux.⁶⁴

Kirk argued instead that Cratylus is first and foremost a proponent of the natural theory of the correctness of names, embracing Heracliteanism because he thinks that it supports his natural theory. Thus when Socrates turns the tables on him he is left 'confusedly and futilely clinging to the Heraclitean view, which Socrates had apparently justified by so many persuasive etymologies.'⁶⁵ This interpretation faces two major hurdles: firstly, Kirk is forced to claim that Cratylus' espousal of Heracliteanism at 440d7-e2—... εἰ μέντοι ἴσθι, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὅτι οὐδὲ νυνὶ ἀσκέπτως ἔχω, ἀλλὰ μοι σκοπουμένῳ καὶ πράγματα ἔχοντι πολὺ μᾶλλον ἐκείνως φαίνεται ἔχειν ὡς Ἡράκλειτος λέγει—refers to the active consideration that he has been devoting to the matter during the dialogue.⁶⁶ Secondly, as Kirk admits, this can only be reconciled with Aristotle's account if we assume that Aristotle was reliant on Plato for his information about Cratylus and for good measure misinterpreted the dialogue.

D.J. Allan offered an alternative, arguing that Plato and Aristotle are talking about Cratylus at different stages of his life, the former describing him as a young man in 399 B.C., the last year of Socrates' life.⁶⁷ This then allows a

account on the grounds that Plato's arguments for Forms do not involve the flux of sensibles; for a reinterpretation and defence of Aristotle's account see T. Irwin, art. cit.

⁶² Weerts, op. cit. p. 6 argues that we cannot derive any historical facts about Cratylus from the dialogue: 'Jeder Versuch, das personale Problem Kratylos aus dem Dialog aufzuhellen, zu seiner historischen Realität vorzudringen, scheitert, wie an dem Mangel außerplatonischer Kriterien, so an der Methode des platonischen Dialogs selbst, in welchem niemals ein schlichter historischer Sachverhalt zum Ausdruck kommt.' This is surely too pessimistic; see Kirk, art. cit., pp. 237-8.

⁶³ J. Stenzel, 'Kratylos', in *Pauly-Wissowa, R.-E.*, XI (1922), columns 1660-1662.

⁶⁴ Art. cit., p. 238.

⁶⁵ Art. cit., p. 227.

⁶⁶ This claim is convincingly rebuffed by Allan, art. cit., pp. 279-280: the words indicate a state of some duration, and the present participles are equivalent here to an imperfect indicative, implying 'protracted or frequent inquiry.'

⁶⁷ Art. cit.

development to take place in Cratylus' views. Allan sees in the references to Euthyphronic inspiration and the need to purge it on the morrow (396d4-397a1) a connection with the *Euthyphro*, *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, all placed dramatically around the time of Socrates' trial. In addition, Socrates is portrayed as an old man, Cratylus as a relatively young man.⁶⁸ The obvious objection to make to this is that Aristotle says that Cratylus was Plato's first teacher in philosophy, before Socrates, and so he cannot be roughly the same age as Plato himself. Not so, argues Allan: Aristotle has logical priority in mind when he places Cratylus before Socrates as influences on Plato,⁶⁹ and the word συνήθης at 987a32 does not mean 'pupil', but merely means 'familiar with'. This allows Cratylus to be the same age as Plato and live on well into the fourth century. Note also that Aristotle describes the position Cratylus reached 'in the end'.⁷⁰

If this is accepted, it is not hard to see how Cratylus could reach a position of radical scepticism: holding a theory of names that supported flux he comes to see how names too are infected with radical flux, inducing a despair with names that was to lead to eventual silence.⁷¹ The Cratylus of *Metaphysics* A 6 is the young man, that of Γ 5 the old.⁷²

Such a developmental account is in principle the best solution, allowing one to regard both the Platonic and Aristotelian accounts as reasonably historical. Allan's arguments for the placing of the dialogue between the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* have not found favour however,⁷³ and whilst that does not destroy his hypothesis it does undermine it. What is needed is some additional textual grounds for accepting the developmental hypothesis. Which is where the phrase ἡλικίαν ἔχεις is important. It precisely points to the possibility of philosophical development on the part of Cratylus. Contemporaries of Plato would know that the historical Cratylus opted for one horn of the dilemma

⁶⁸ 429d7-8; 440d5.

⁶⁹ p. 275, note 2.

⁷⁰ τὸ τελευτᾶν, 1010a12.

⁷¹ This position seems similar to that of Henry Jackson as reported by Kirk, pp. 239-240.

⁷² A more complex developmental hypothesis can be found in B. Cassin, 'Le Doigt de Cratyle', *Revue de Philosophie Ancienne*, 5 (1987), 139-150; she sees Cratylus moving from one idealist stance to another, from a belief in true and only true names to one in language being mere noise, in both avoiding the possibility of falsity. Thereby she claims that of the two types of opponent of the principle of non-contradiction Cratylus moves from being one of those whom Aristotle describes as speaking λόγον χάριν and whose very words must be refuted, to someone whose way of thinking rather than their arguments must be met (Γ 5, 1009a16-22).

⁷³ Owen (in a note to an unpublished paper on the *Cratylus*) points out that the conversation at the King's Porch reported in the *Cratylus* 396d4-397a1 cannot be that which the *Euthyphro* reports, firstly because it takes place from daybreak and so the *Theaetetus* cannot have preceded it as it would have to on Allan's argument, and secondly because the contents of the *Euthyphro* can hardly be said to set an inspiring model for etymology. In addition, the idea of a purging by a Sophist is a natural metaphor, given that they are represented as authorities on the correctness of names. See also J.V. Luce, 'The Date of the *Cratylus*', *American Journal of Philology* 85 (1964), 136-154 (pp.138-9).

presented in the final aporia, that of a belief in flux so extreme that names are to be avoided, led there ironically by a belief that names reflect flux in the world. And, just as Plato's readers would know that Theaetetus had indeed turned out for the good, so too they would know that Cratylus had gone to the (philosophical) bad.

A further parallel for this can be found in the portrayal of Charmides. He is described in that dialogue as being the most beautiful of the youngsters present, someone Socrates had known, but before he came into his prime.⁷⁴ Implicitly, Charmides was then ἐν τῇ ἡλικίᾳ, and contemporary readers would be all too well aware of the direction he was to take. Cratylus likewise was presumably a notorious figure, at least in Athenian philosophical circles, and not someone to emulate.

We have then I would suggest Platonic licence to accept the Allan account, at least in its essentials: the Cratylus with whom Plato mixed believed in a natural theory of names that supported his Heracliteanism,⁷⁵ but gradually came to adopt a radical position whereby nothing in the world was said to enjoy any sort of stability. By the time Aristotle was aware of him he had relinquished words altogether. The *Cratylus* then perhaps dramatises the beginning of the end of his more youthful belief in moderate flux.⁷⁶ There is no need to regard this as a rigidly historical record of some Pauline conversion to extreme flux, for undoubtedly Plato is using Cratylus and his ideas for his own philosophical ends, but it is reasonable to assume that a kernel of historical truth remains.⁷⁷ If this is so, it suggests that Cratylus was an important figure to Plato, and that the refutation of Cratylus was therefore of some personal importance. My interpretation of the final aporia in 6.5 below will give additional reasons for emphasising the importance of Cratylus and his refutation to Plato. Whether one calls him a teacher or not, it is plausible to claim that he was important to Plato's early ventures in philosophy.

Cratylus grasped one horn of the dilemma presented at the close of the dialogue; there remain other options. I hope to have demonstrated how Plato encourages the reader to seek them out. The dialogue appears to move in a

⁷⁴ *Charmides* 154a3-b2.

⁷⁵ The belief in moderate flux and a natural theory of names, even if ultimately incoherent, was, *pace* Kirk, not *prima facie* absurd; see further 6.5 below.

⁷⁶ Kirk, art. cit., p.242 note 16, dismisses the idea that Plato shows Cratylus at the moment of change from a belief in names to a belief in flux, arguing that there is no reason for Plato to be so historical about an event before his birth. Kirk's dating of this change is reliant on the view (attacked by Allan) that Cratylus' life did not stretch far into the fourth century; and the change dramatised in the *Cratylus* on the above interpretation is from a belief in stable names/meanings and (moderate) flux to a belief in universal, extreme flux.

⁷⁷ This has similarities with Stenzel's interpretation. He however downplays Cratylus' interest in etymology and the natural theory, and attributes to Cratylus a belief in an objective and subjective correctness of names. See Kirk, art. cit., pp. 241-2 for criticisms of this view.

circle, from dead end to apparent clarity then back to another dead end; this appearance is deliberate but the escape from the circle rests with us. I hope also to have vindicated somewhat the intellectual abilities of Hermogenes and the opening of the dialogue itself. What appears to be an abrupt and clumsy opening is in fact skilfully written, demonstrating the nature of the theories of Cratylus and Hermogenes, and what happens when dialectic has stalled.

CHAPTER TWO

THE THEORY OF SOCRATES

In this chapter I will discuss the alternative that Socrates puts forward to the theories outlined above, attempting to demonstrate how he avoids the pitfalls that Cratylus and Hermogenes fall into whilst retaining the positive points of their respective views. This exposition will also constitute a defence, or at least a partial justification, of Plato against the criticisms of the whole tool analogy argument levelled by Robinson and others.

Robinson believes that Plato wrote the *Cratylus* to purge himself of the baleful influence of the natural theory and that the poor quality of the arguments for the nature theory in the tool analogy passage measured against those against it at 434-9 proves the point.¹ Thus the argument at 385bc to the effect that since λόγοι are true or false, so too are ὀνόματα, he regards as committing the fallacy of division; the claim that actions, like things, have a nature of their own and thus must be performed according to that nature is deemed to be vague; and the assumption of the whole argument that a name is a tool like a shuttle is attacked on the grounds that names are neither constructed like a shuttle nor things we naturally possess, like hands, but belong to the realm of culture, handed down to us. A further criticism is that there is no distinction made between naming as baptism and naming as use, the original naming of something and using that name of it thereafter.

Robinson sees the nature theory as expressing our need to see ourselves as reasonable beings, controlled by reason in naming as in other spheres. Its defects thus arise from its over-rational approach to the business of language and naming, blinding its supporters to the fact that the job of names is to refer, and nothing else. That Plato was over-impressed by the possibilities of rationalism might be conceded; but it seems to me that Robinson has fundamentally misread the tool analogy argument. In brief, I will argue that Socrates puts forward a prescription for language as a standard against which to measure existing languages; as such, claims that he does not account for language as it

¹ R. Robinson, 'A Criticism of Plato's *Cratylus*', reprinted in his *Essays in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford, 1969), 118-138. Similar remarks are made by T.W. Bestor, 'Plato's Semantics and Plato's *Cratylus*', *Phronesis* 25 (1980), 306-330 (322-327).

is miss the mark. At the same time he allows for degrees of success in meeting the criteria for proper naming.² This will allow him to take account later of the demands of convention in existing languages. The tool analogy argument is almost a preliminary sketch, offering various possibilities of development; it would be unwise to jettison it too soon.

2.1 Truth and Falsity in Names

385b2-d1 is quite possibly the most discussed passage in the whole dialogue, as not only has the logic of the argument been vigorously debated, but even its place in the text has been called into question. In the wake of Robinson's briefly worded condemnation have come many to deny the charge of fallacious reasoning, or at least to argue that Plato was consciously using a bad argument;³ these I shall discuss below. Firstly however, the question of the place of the argument in the text needs to be examined.

Schofield's thesis is that 385b2-d1 belongs in fact between 387c5 and c6.⁴ The passage is an intrusion where it stands, interrupting a series of questions aimed at ascertaining Hermogenes' views with an argument which has no clear bearing on his thesis;⁵ in the later position however it would explain two memory-jogging past tenses which would otherwise be mysterious, and supply clarification of, and argument for, the claim in 387c6-7 that naming and saying sentences are strictly comparable actions. One then has to assume some kind of copying mistake early in the transmission of the text.

Schofield's negative thesis, that 385b2-d1 is misplaced in the text is plausible; one has but to witness the problems commentators have had trying to explain its present position and relevance to Hermogenes' theory.⁶ Less

² B.H. Weingartner, 'The *Cratylus* and the Defense of Dialectic', in his *The Unity of the Platonic Dialogue: the Cratylus, the Protagoras, the Parmenides* (Indianapolis/New York, 1973), 15-43, puts this point well: 'His [Socrates'] theory is not primarily an account of how names are *actually* made, but of how names *ought* to be made ... for Socrates there is no sharp distinction between what is the case and what ought to be; rather, there is a continuum which has at one end the making of names very poorly, so that they are barely names at all, and at the other end the perfect making of names...' (p. 32).

³ As Robinson himself suggests, art. cit., p. 123.

⁴ M. Schofield, 'A Displacement in the Text of the *Cratylus*', *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1972), 246-253.

⁵ Note especially 385d2-3, 'Ὁ ἄν ἄρ' ἕκαστος φῆ τις ἕκαστω ὀνόματα εἶναι, τοῦτό ἐστιν ἕκαστω ὄνομα...'. To license this conclusion one has to go back to 385a6-b1, *before* the passage under suspicion.

⁶ Some examples: Robinson, art. cit., p. 123, thinks that the argument claims that the natural rightness of a name is its being true, the natural wrongness is its being false; N. Kretzmann, 'Plato on the Correctness of Names', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (1971), 126-138, suggests that Socrates was trying to show that Hermogenes' extreme subjectivism prevents one from

plausible however is his transposition. The obscurity that he sees in 387c6-7 is unlikely to trouble anyone after reading 385b2-d1 even in its manuscript position, especially if one reads, with Burnet, διονομαῖζοντες at 387c6-7,⁷ and the 'memory-jogging' past tenses, even if they appear a little forced, can be accommodated.

Yet if the transposition fails to convince one must try to explain as best one what the argument is doing at this point in the text. More precisely, why does Socrates introduce the idea of true and false names? Kretzmann, Fine,⁸ and others point forward to 430e3-433a2 for a fuller explanation of the import of 385bd. Such a strategy however risks treating the latter passage as merely a fuller statement of the former, rather than a genuine development of it; the latter is the case, as I shall try to demonstrate. Anagnostopoulos claims that naming by fiat combined with certain assumptions about truth and falsity leads one into speaking falsehoods, and that to save his extreme theory Hermogenes would have to adopt a Protagorean or Euthydemean position, which he will not do.⁹ Yet this is not so: Hermogenes can (verbally) disagree with someone but claim to be speaking the truth in his own idiolect.¹⁰ The fact that this theory makes it impossible to distinguish between true and false statements is another matter.¹¹ A better suggestion comes from Rijlaarsdam, who quotes examples to support her claim that to call a man a horse and vice versa was 'ein sprichwörtlicher Ausdruck für "falsch beurteilen, zwei Dinge miteinander verwechseln."'¹² If so, this would ease the move from correctness to truth.

The best approach seems to be to regard this passage as in some way 'softening up' Hermogenes for his eventual refutation, rather than interpreting it as an intended knock-out blow. It takes the combination of the extreme

distinguishing between true and false statements, but admits that the argument is truncated (p. 127); E. Heitsch, 'Platons Sprachphilosophie im *Kratylos*', *Hermes* 113 (1985), 44-62 (pp. 50-1), claims that it is an attempted refutation of Hermogenes' theory, and that Hermogenes' reiteration of his theory gives a hint to the reader that he should not accept that theory as refuted either; J.C. Rijlaarsdam, *Platon über die Sprache, ein Kommentar zum Kratylos* (Utrecht, 1978), argues that what the argument is actually aimed at is someone who denies that names can be true and false in the same way as sentences (pp. 62-64). This list of examples could be extended; Schofield is right to insist that as it stands the argument of 385b2-d1 cannot refute Hermogenes, for there is nothing inconsistent in Hermogenes accepting the truth and falsity of names and continuing to hold his extreme thesis.

⁷ Schofield prefers the reading of BW, ὀνομαῖζοντες, whilst Burnet's text is a compromise from καὶ διονομαῖζοντες. Τ. διονομαῖζειν occurs also at *Politicus* 263d5.

⁸ G. Fine, 'Plato on Naming', *Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1977), 289-301.

⁹ G. Anagnostopoulos, 'Plato's *Cratylus*: the Two Theories of the Correctness of Names', *Review of Metaphysics* 25 (1971/2), 691-736 (p. 701).

¹⁰ Objection: if this is so, Hermogenes would indeed be adopting a Protagorean position. This need not be so. Hermogenes' theory claims that we can all use different names ἐπὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς, 385e1; if he uses 'man' where others use 'horse' their disagreement is over naming, not the nature of the thing to be named.

¹¹ See Kretzmann, art. cit., p. 127.

¹² Op. cit., p. 55. See, eg. *Thi.* 195d6-9.

convention thesis, a belief in truth and falsity, the stability of things and actions, the need to perform actions according to their natures and yet more before Socrates is prepared to announce that Cratylus is right, at 390d7-e4. Hermogenes' theory, allowing changing names at will, does away with dialectic; as such an inquiry after Hermogenes' views on truth and falsity is in order, though not on its own sufficient to refute him. Likewise Cratylus will be questioned on this very point later.¹³

This may be sufficient to explain truth and falsity being introduced; but why put forward the idea of true and false names? This does seem to be a simple mistake: propositions carry truth-value, names do not. Plato's point presumably is that a logos, say 'Cratylus sits', is true, if and only if someone is sitting and that person is Cratylus. In other words, both names have to be 'true of' that state of affairs if the logos is to be true, though the converse does not apply. Various commentators have defended Plato along these lines, though with interesting variations. Two broad differences emerge, between those who argue that the argument is cogent as it stands and those who prefer to look to the account of allocating a picture to someone at 430e3-433a2 to find a more acceptable theory of naming, assuming that the earlier argument is to be interpreted in the same light. Of the first group, both Lorenz/Mittelstrass and W.M. Pfeiffer claim in different ways that the argument is a positively good one. The former argue that, since names are to be taken as predicates, 'their truth and falsehood is, therefore, to be understood as the respective truth value of elementary sentences which affirm those predicates of individuals given by context only.'¹⁴ Pfeiffer, noting that truth and falsity on this interpretation are still properties of sentences, albeit elementary ones, argues that in 385b Plato makes the first articulate statement of the correspondence theory of truth for discourse in general, which he then extends to names in 385c. Names are not true and false *simpliciter*, but they are *spoken* (λέγεται) as true or false, that is, as parts of discourse.¹⁵

Pfeiffer's emphasis on the fact that names have to be said or spoken to have a truth value is valuable; but both interpretations are perhaps rather charitable to this sketchy argument. Thus other commentators have, whilst rejecting the interpretation of Robinson, looked further afield.¹⁶ Fine points out that in 430-431 names are correct and incorrect and can be truly and falsely applied to things: 'Plato's talk of truth in assignment suggests he means, not that names

¹³ 429c6-d6.

¹⁴ K. Lorenz and J. Mittelstrass, 'On Rational Philosophy of Language: the Programme in Plato's *Cratylus* Reconsidered', *Mind* 76 (1967), 1-20 (p. 6).

¹⁵ W.M. Pfeiffer, 'True and False Speech in Plato's *Cratylus*', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 2 (1972-3), 87-104.

¹⁶ G. Fine, art. cit.; cf M. Richardson, 'True and False Names in the *Cratylus*', *Phronesis* 21(1976), 135-145.

are true and false in the same way as sentences are ... but rather that names are true or false of things and can be rightly or wrongly applied to them.' On this view, Fine admits, the 385bd argument is invalid as it assumes that names and sentences are true and false in the same way, but rapidly moves on from this one brief, and unrepresentative, argument.¹⁷

She goes further in claiming that the later passage presents the same distinctions between stating and naming as the *Sophist*. In the sentence 'Theaetetus is flying', 'Theaetetus' picks out Theaetetus, but only when the words 'is flying' are added is something actually said about him. This avoids the problem of falsity seemingly lying in the misapplication of a name. Likewise in the *Cratylus* Fine claims there is a two-stage process going on: 'The subject of discourse is indicated, correctly, by the preamble "This is your name", together with an ostensive device such as pointing . . . One then goes on to assign a name, and it is only then that truth or falsity results, *after* the referent has been otherwise indicated.'¹⁸

Williams is more cautious, but also suggests that this διανομή argument has some potential to disarm general arguments against the possibility of falsity.¹⁹ Caution, it seems to me, is appropriate. Socrates draws a partial analogy between the presenting of a picture to someone and saying this is your picture and presenting a name and saying this is your name; the disanalogy is that as well as having correct and incorrect attributions names are true and false of their referents. This may seem a puzzle: if both pictures and names are μιμήματα of their originals, why should names be special in this way? The reason, Williams suggests, is that a διανομή of a name amounts to saying 'You are "N"', which is a λόγος that can be true and false.²⁰ So far so good. But then the problem is that correctness and truth and falsity are not sufficiently distinguished. Fine claims the subject of discourse is indicated, 'correctly', by the ostensive gesture and the preamble 'this is your name', but this is not quite what Socrates says; he calls attributions of names correct and true or incorrect and false,²¹ so that to say 'woman' as a man's name is incorrect and false rather than predicating a false name of someone. One could claim that Socrates is discussing naming as baptism here, rather than naming as use, but the phrase 'incorrect and false' suggests that he is not consciously separating reference and description in the *Sophist* manner.²² It seems that the individual name is being called upon to do too much, referring and describing.

¹⁷ Art. cit., pp. 295-6.

¹⁸ Art. cit., p. 300.

¹⁹ B.A.O. Williams, 'Cratylus' Theory of Names and its Refutation', in *Language and Logos: Studies Presented to G.E.L. Owen* (Cambridge, 1982), 83-93 (pp. 88-9).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ 430d2-7.

²² See also Williams, art. cit., p. 89, who argues that Socrates only takes up with name-giving again at 431c4ff.

This is not a damning criticism of the *Cratylus*; after all, Socrates has already warned us not to expect a general answer to the problem of falsity.²³ The *Sophist* discussion is clearer, but then it is trying to solve the general paradox of Not-Being. This is an instance of the way in which the *Cratylus* is a teasing work, recalling important passages in 'late' dialogues, yet never quite matching up to their detail and sophistication.²⁴ There is certainly a continuity between the *Sophist* and the *Cratylus* discussions; as Fine points out, the former's distinction between referring and saying does not mean that all names do not describe essences, even when they are fulfilling a referring function in a given sentence. What is an ὄνομα in one sentence can be a ῥῆμα in another. The point is that the referring and describing functions in any one sentence are to be kept distinct. In the *Cratylus* Plato, even if he is clear in his own mind about the distinction, does not spell this out. He has different aims in mind.

If then the *Cratylus* discussion is still lacking, 385bd might be less 'unrepresentative' than Fine allows. That argument lays down that if a λόγος is true, so too are all its parts, even the smallest. This simple analytical model encapsulates the foundationalist assumption that knowledge must be based on knowledge, that the elements of something must be as intelligible as the compound if knowledge is to be possible.²⁵ Yet when applied to names problems arise. Even the smallest parts of language have truth-value; but these smallest parts of language turn out to be, not complex names, or even basic names like δοῦν, ῥέον and ἰόν, but syllables and individual letters, the so-called πρῶτα ὀνόματα, the mimetic base of language.²⁶ Now if one demands that every mimetic πρῶτον ὄνομα of any ὑστερον ὄνομα be true if that complex name is to be true, as the argument demands, trouble can easily arise, for either a complex name is 'completely' true, down to each πρῶτον, or it does not refer to (describe) that object at all through the lack or superfluity of even one πρῶτον.²⁷ Hence the possibility of speaking both truly and falsely is removed—but that possibility is the first premise of the argument.²⁸ One can see this in Cratylus' reaction to the hypothetical case of misidentification at 429e3–430a5: the person addressing him wrongly is merely producing hot air.

²³ 429d7-8.

²⁴ Compare for example the refutation of Protagoras at 385e4-386d2 to the lengthy attack on his relativism in the *Theaetetus*.

²⁵ See 426a3-b2 and J. Annas, 'Knowledge and Language: the *Theaetetus* and the *Cratylus*', in *Language and Logos: Studies Presented to G.E.L. Owen*, edited by M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum (Cambridge, 1982), 95-114.

²⁶ That the individual letters and syllables are the πρῶτα is not uncontroversial; for a defence of this interpretation, see 3.3 below.

²⁷ Hence Cratylus' claims at 429b1ff, 431e9-432a4.

²⁸ 385b2-3.

This simple analytical model whereby every part of a name or logos bears equal weight is potentially dangerous. Socrates is alive to the dangers: he insists that there are degrees of success in naming, better and worse namegivers,²⁹ and the 'Two Cratyluses' argument reduces the idea of perfect correspondence to an absurdity. He then concludes that names can be well or badly given, and inappropriate letters used. By the same reasoning, inappropriate names in a λόγος, and an inappropriate λόγος ἐν λόγῳ can be used, καὶ μηδὲν ἥττον ὀνομάζεσθαι τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ λέγεσθαι, ἕως ἂν ὁ τύπος ἐνῇ τοῦ πρᾶγματος περὶ οὗ ἂν ὁ λόγος ᾖ.³⁰

This whole passage 430a-432e is in effect not only filling out details of Plato's views on naming but also perhaps marks the beginnings of a shift away from an emphasis on names, or at least an awareness that names are not all of equal import in a logos. Certainly ὄνομα is no longer used to refer to all names. Neither Hermogenes nor Cratylus show any awareness of any distinction between the correctness of names and the truth of statements; what I would suggest is that Plato is moving away from the view that names and sentences are exactly comparable. Different names in a given sentence can be 'true' in a sense, but they will differ in function.³¹ This does not mean he need give up the claim that all names have descriptive content, as Fine herself shows.³² What it does mean is that the argument of 385bd in practice needs to be used carefully.

What all this amounts to is perhaps this: 385bd is part of a bare sketch of a prescriptive theory; much needs to be filled in, and can be filled in in differing ways. A more sophisticated notion of the truth and falsity of names and sentences can be developed consistent with the passage, and just this is happening later in the dialogue. Thus 430-2 marks progress in understanding the differing functions of names and sentences, albeit within the framework of the natural hypothesis, which we might say overemphasises the importance of the individual name. Once the natural theory of names had been shown to be an ideal to be aimed at as far as existing languages are concerned, Plato could turn his attention to the general problem of false speaking. Even if Plato clung to the belief that all names have descriptive content,³³ how important he felt that descriptive content was in the normal run of things is another matter. He is not so much purging the natural theory from his mind, as Robinson believed, as putting it in its rightful place.

²⁹ See, eg, 429b1-8.

³⁰ 432e5-7. Note that Socrates has the same parallelism between names and sentences in this argument as at 385bd.

³¹ The distinction between ὀνόματα and ῥήματα is used at 425a1-2 and 431b5-6.

³² Art. cit., p. 301.

³³ See also J.V. Luce, 'Plato on Truth and Falsity in Names', *Classical Quarterly* N.S. 19 (1969), 222-232.

2.2 *The Socratic Theory*

In 385d2-e3 Hermogenes reaffirms his extreme theory,³⁴ whereupon Socrates quizzes him on his opinion of the 'Man is the Measure' doctrine of Protagoras. The Protagorean theory would seem an attractive position for Hermogenes to adopt, supporting his conception of a private language with a relativist ontology and epistemology, but he has pondered this very question, and in the end rejected the Protagorean view.³⁵ Socrates reinforces this decision by showing that Protagoras' doctrine abolishes the distinction between (objectively) good and bad men, one which Hermogenes wishes to uphold. Euthydemus' theory is rejected for the same reason. The alternative offered by Socrates is that things have a stable being (οὐσίᾱ), which Hermogenes accepts. Thus one arrives at the first principle of Socrates' theory:

- (S1) each thing has its natural, objective and stable being (386d9-e4).

It is interesting to compare 386d9-e4 to 383a4-b2 where Hermogenes outlines Cratylus' theory. In both there are three linked statements: for C (1) each of τὰ ὄντα has a natural correctness of name there is (1*) τὰ πράγματα have their own stable being; parallel to C (2) names are not whatever sounds τινες συνθέμενοι καλεῖν καλῶσι there is (2*) these beings are not dragged hither and thither by our perceptions of them; and instead of C (3) there is a natural correctness of names fixed for Greeks and barbarians alike, Socrates claims (3*) the πράγματα are identified with their own natural being.

There is no good reason for Socrates to express (S1) in this rather clumsy looking way unless it is to recall Cratylus' theory. What the comparison brings out is that whilst Cratylus stresses the objective correctness of names, Socrates

³⁴ This seems to me to suggest that he knows full well that Socrates has not refuted him as yet; those who think that Hermogenes is represented as an amiable idiot have to explain it differently, eg Kretzmann, art. cit. p.127, who thinks that it shows Hermogenes is unaware of the difference between autonomous languages and autonomous idiolects; Fine, art. cit. note 18, suggests however that Hermogenes' failure to see the relevance of 385bd to the correctness of names is caused by Plato's use of 'true' where elsewhere he uses 'correct'; Lorenz and Mittelstrass, thinking the argument a refutation of Hermogenes, are surprised to see him still holding on to his thesis (pp.6-7). The most economical interpretation it seem to me is that Hermogenes has not been refuted and knows full well he has not been refuted.

³⁵ Note that one of his arguments for conventionalism is that different names are used for *the same things*, 385e1-3.

emphasizes the objective reality of the *nominata*. It is because there are stable things with their own being in the world that our naming can serve any useful purpose at all. Cratylus has got things in a muddle: instead of really going back to the bedrock of naming, the *nominata*, he posits implicitly an ideal language that describes those *nominata*. From this it is easy to reach the position that he himself states later on, that names are epistemologically prior to things.³⁶ The parallel between how the two positions are presented subtly reinforces this point.

A similar observation can be made with respect to Hermogenes' first statement of his theory at 384c10-d8. firstly he declares that the correctness of names depends on *συνθήκη καὶ ὁμολογία*; secondly, he stresses that the individual can change a name at whim, and thirdly he concludes that names are *νόμος* not *φύσει*. This careful parallelism serves not only to differentiate the theories of Hermogenes and Cratylus but also to emphasise the crucial distinction between Socrates and them both: ontology comes first.

It is only after this has been established that Socrates moves on to discuss *πράξεις*. In any action one will succeed if one performs it according to the natures of the things involved, and fail if one performs it contrary to their natures. Given that *πράξεις* have their own objective natures, and speaking and more specifically naming are *πράξεις* (both are highly disputable) Socrates arrives at:

- (S2) things must be named according to the dictates of nature, not our whims, if our naming is to be successful (387d4-9).

Quite what this principle amounts to, however, is not for the present very clear. Hence Robinson's criticism: 'This is a vague argument rather than a bad one. There is something in it; but it is by no means clear precisely what, or whether what there is in it is precisely what is needed to establish the nature-theory.'³⁷ The vagueness that Robinson dislikes so much however can be a sign of strength, once one sees the argument as the skeleton of a theory which we can try to fill out for ourselves, a blueprint to be followed, but not slavishly. This then allows one to retrace the steps of the argument on rereading the dialogue and explore different possible interpretations. One must remember that Socrates denies at 391a4-6 that he can expound the precise nature of correctness of names.³⁸

A possible reading would be that names must be used consistently, one name for each thing, and not swapped around. A bolder interpretation would

³⁶ 435d4-6.

³⁷ Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

³⁸ Thus Kretzmann, *art. cit.* pp. 131-133, distinguishes between the general theory that is outlined in the tool analogy argument which he believes Plato accepts as true, and the special theory which is the development of it during the rest of the dialogue and which has to be rejected. See also note 78 below.

involve descriptive qualities and, given the elaborate way in which (S2) is worded, something like that seems needed.³⁹ This does not necessarily mean the pure Cratylan theory however. Cratylus, as has been shown, posits a language of ideal names, rejecting all other would-be names. Socrates, putting the stability of things as the foundation of everything else, is able to accept that bits of speech that refer yet fail to describe adequately or at all are still names; the very analogies he uses, crafts in which there are good, bad and indifferent practitioners, show that a like scale of achievement in naming is to be assumed.

A further point: 'to name' and *ὀνομάζειν* are both ambiguous between imposing and using a name, and one of Robinson's criticisms was that Plato was confused on this very point.⁴⁰ Commentators have disagreed on this issue: Kretzmann says the ambiguity only occasionally affects the argument and that the context makes plain that imposition is the intended sense,⁴¹ whereas Ketchum argues that in 387-388 the focus is on naming in the 'use' sense.⁴² I shall delay discussion of this point for the present, merely noting that I think Plato can be interpreted consistently on this point in a way which avoids Robinson's criticisms.

Only now does Socrates move on to the name itself, which, continuing the analogy with crafts, is likened to other craftsmen's tools. He concludes that:

- (S3) a name is a tool for teaching and the dividing up of reality
(388b13-c1).

Note that language is once again put in its place: names should correspond to reality, not the other way around. And again there is a problem of interpretation: calling a name a διδασκαλικόν τι ὄργανον might amount to saying that a name is a teaching tool in the sense that it describes the nominatum's essence, which at one extreme would mean a Cratylan 'know the name and know the thing' claim, or at the other end of the spectrum one could merely be arguing that a name picks out some πράγματα in the world referentially; various other claims lie between these poles. At present it seems a strong claim is being made: in an ideal language, names will tell us by various means much about their nomina. In the case of the second function of names, that of διάκρισις, there is even more at stake, perhaps even a reference to collection and division.⁴³ Here however the reference seems to be rather to an aspect of the

³⁹ Οὐκ οὖν καὶ ὀνομαστέον ἢ πέφυκε τὰ πράγματα ὀνομάζειν τε καὶ ὀνομάζεσθαι καὶ ᾧ, 387d4-5.

⁴⁰ Op. cit., pp. 134-138.

⁴¹ Art. cit., p. 128, note 5.

⁴² See R.J. Ketchum, 'Names, Forms and Conventionalism: *Cratylus* 383-395', *Phronesis* 24 (1979), 133-147, note 3; he points to the teacher as the namer *par excellence* and asks what does the νομοθέτης do if the teacher creates names when he names.

⁴³ Kretzmann, art. cit., p. 128, makes much of this 'taxonomic' as he calls it task: 'The essential nature of a name, then, is that of a taxonomic tool, and it is on taxonomy rather than instruction ...

teaching function: a name helps divide up the contents of the world by revealing (or 'teaching us about') something's nature; as such they are not two separate functions of a name at all, but the separating function is secondary to the teaching function, not the other way around.

An objection could be made here that this is a very limited view of the nature of language: we have more to do with language than just dividing up reality and teaching each other. Since discussing these objections takes one on to wider issues I shall delay dealing with them until later.

Socrates now outlines an abstract theory of the name-giving. The teacher uses the product of the appropriate craftsman's labour, the craftsman in this case being the namegiver. Not every man is a namegiver (note this directly contradicts the extreme conventionalist position of Hermogenes), rather:

(S4) the namegiver is the rarest of craftsmen amongst men
(388e7-389a3).

Hermogenes' theory presented a picture of everyone being qualified to name things; Cratylus, by rejecting *Hermogenes* as a name for Hermogenes implicitly believes something quite contrary, that some at least so-called names are mere hot air and that only a few initiates (cf *μυνταίων*, 384a5) know which pieces of speech are names. (S4) is therefore rather Cratylan in spirit. The namegiver is the man who possesses the *τέχνη* of naming, that is, of attaching the correct names to things according to their essences.

It is important to be clear what is at issue here. Many scholars have repeated the old view that the *Cratylus* is concerned at least in part with the origin of languages question that became a bone of contention with the Epicureans, namely whether language emerges by nature or by convention.⁴⁴ More recent scholars, eg Robinson,⁴⁵ and Detlev Fehling⁴⁶ have argued very forcefully against that view: the origin of language is not in doubt, it is by the *θέσις* of one or more namegivers. The issue is the correctness of names, a quite separate matter. The *νομοθέτης* is a symbol of rational authority, not a distant historical figure, a Solonic-style bearer of *νόμοι*. This view is, I believe, broadly correct, though there is some more to be said on the origins question. What this means is that (S4) is a prescription for a philosophically sound language: such a

that the remainder of the discussion with Hermogenes focuses.' Contra, see M. Schofield, 'The Dénouement of the *Cratylus*', in *Language and Logos: Studies Presented to G.E.L. Owen*, edited by M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum (Cambridge, 1982), 61-81, note 2: no more is heard about *διακρίνειν* in the *Cratylus*, as opposed to teaching or disclosure of essences through etymology.

⁴⁴ Eg H.N. Fowler in the introduction to his Loeb translation of the dialogue: the interest of the dialogue lies 'in its technical perfection and in the fact that it is the earliest extant attempt to discuss the origin of language.' (p. 4).

⁴⁵ 'The Theory of Names in Plato's *Cratylus*', in *Essays*, 100-117 (103-106).

⁴⁶ 'Zwei Untersuchungen zur griechischen Sprachphilosophie', *Rheinisches Museum* 108 (1965), 212-229 (pp. 218-29).

language *should* be the product of this rare craftsman, the namegiver.

Socrates is thus laying down the theoretical foundations of a philosophically sound language; this may or may not be identical with the origin of a language, e.g., Greek itself. One might object that this theory is not necessarily prescriptive; the latter references to the degeneration of the Greek language are surely compatible with Socrates here making the claim that Greek was, at least originally, a 'natural' language that has declined from its former pristine state.⁴⁷ This however is to confuse what Socrates separates: first comes the abstract prescription, then the detailed investigation into Greek; when Hermogenes wants more precise details about the correctness of names Socrates stresses that the tool analogy argument is only the result of their preliminary joint investigation. He is making no claims about whether or not Greek is or is not a natural language at this stage;⁴⁸ that is the subject of further investigation.⁴⁹ This means that his theory is not tied to any particular historical situation, rather, it is a general prescription for language; as such, it can be used as a model for a philosophical re-evaluation of existing languages.

A puzzle remains however as to why the *Cratylus* is so often seen as a treatise on the origin of language. One reason that Robinson suggests is that the Epicureans were to discuss that issue later, using not dissimilar terminology. There is, however, no evidence as to how the Epicureans read the *Cratylus*.⁵⁰ Another explanation is available, more integral to the dialogue itself. Cratylus, as I have stressed, fails to distinguish between a prescriptive theory and a descriptive one, leading him to assume that Greek must meet the prescription and reveal essences. Since for him names qua names are philosophically sound, revealing essences, the origin of the philosophical language cannot but be identical with the origin of language *tout court*. This raises the problem of how the first namegiver produced language *de novo*; add Cratylus's claim that the proper way of learning is through names,⁵¹ and one arrives at the position where it is impossible for the language to be created at all, for how can the namegiver give names if the only way of discovery is through looking at names?⁵² By 438c1-4 Cratylus is forced to claim a divine origin for names to keep his natural theory alive. Thus one can see that although Plato is not interested in the origin of names, the philosophical errors of Cratylus do in his case force the issue onto our attention. This may explain to some extent the survival of the idea that the *Cratylus* is concerned with the origin of names. In general, anyone who claims that a language, even a group of names, fits the prescription

⁴⁷ See 414c4-7, 418b1-d6 for example.

⁴⁸ 391a4-b2.

⁴⁹ τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο χρητὴ ζητεῖν . . . ἥτις ποτ' αὖ ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ ἡ ὁρθότης, 391b4-5.

⁵⁰ I owe this point to Dr D.N. Sedley.

⁵¹ 435d4-6

⁵² 438a8-b3

for an ideal language, needs to explain how this state of linguistic grace arose.

The moral is once again that one must separate the prescriptive ideal from the descriptive reality. Plato is not interested in descriptive linguistics *per se* rather the prescriptive ideal model of what a language should be. Thus he can afford to ignore the question of historical origins and focus on the philosophical issue of the correctness of names.

The notion of the τέχνη is then developed. When a shuttle is broken one does not use the broken one as a model for building another, rather one looks at the form Shuttle; and likewise in other crafts, one must discover the naturally fitting tool and render it into the naturally fitting material.⁵³ And so:

- (S5) the namegiver must understand how to render the naturally fitting name for each thing into letters and syllables, using the form Name as his guide (389d4-8).

The status and function of the forms introduced into the argument here has unsurprisingly occasioned much debate.⁵⁴ There are several reasons to resist interpreting the forms here as transcendent. Firstly, the status of εἶδη inevitably raises the question of their status at 439-440. In the latter case, the dream image alone suggests strongly that something bolder is being introduced for the first time in the dialogue, about which Socrates expresses doubts, namely transcendent Forms.⁵⁵ Secondly, the analogy with craftsmen militates against a transcendent reading.⁵⁶ Thirdly, the notion of a transcendent Form of Name is in itself puzzling; Calvert suggests that the Form of Name 'amounts

⁵³ 389c3-6.

⁵⁴ A few competing views: J.V. Luce, 'The Theory of Ideas in the *Cratylus*', *Phronesis* 10 (1965), 21-36, argues that the *Cratylus* account, though superficially similar to *Republic* 596b-597d where the Idea of Bed appears, is in fact less complete and clarified and thus represents a stage prior to the developed middle period theory; B. Calvert, 'Forms and Flux in Plato's *Cratylus*', *Phronesis* 15 (1970), 26-47, claims that Plato is making a distinction between the (fully transcendent) Form Name and the Proper Form of Name relative to a particular thing; Anagnostopoulos, art. cit. pp. 713ff, rejects any hint of transcendent Forms here and claims that Plato means by the ideal shuttle or name the necessary and sufficient conditions which anything must have in order to be called a shuttle or name; Ketchum, art. cit. pp. 140-144, sees no ontological distinction between Forms and Proper Forms and argues that the Proper Forms of Name are the meanings of words in the sense that they are the feature of the word through which a word is true of the things it is true of and means what it means; in contrast, Heitsch, art. cit., pp. 56-62, claims a three-fold division is in play: first in rank is the Form, which is the function of, e.g., a shuttle or a name (in the latter case this function is to teach), second is the specific Form Name, the 'reference' of a name, then lastly come the names themselves. Thus Ἐκτωρ, Ἀστυάναξ and Ἀρχέπολις all have as their reference βασιλεύς, though their meanings differ. Contrast again D.D. Heath, 'On Plato's *Cratylus*', *Journal of Philology* 17 (1888), 192-218, who compares αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν ὄνομα to the decidedly untranscendent Aristotelian expression for essence τί ᾗν εἶναι, pointing to the fact that the analogy is with an intelligent Athenian craftsman (pp. 193-4).

⁵⁵ Though contra see T.H. Irwin, 'Plato's Heracliteanism', *Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1977), 1-13 (p. 2).

⁵⁶ Though *Rep.* 10 weakens the force of this argument.

requirement that every actual name must fulfil in order to be a name—it must mean something’,⁵⁷ but there seems no need to read this in a transcendent way.

Yet if the Form Name is not transcendent, what relationship holds between it and the Proper Form of Name (τὸ ἐκάστῳ φύσει πεφυκὸς ὄνομα)? Here the shuttle analogy becomes strained, and the term ὄνομα, which already refers to all kinds of words, shows a further ambiguity. For although at 389d6-7 the namegiver is said to use αὐτὸ δ’ ἔστιν ὄνομα as a guide in making names, by 390e2-3 the Proper Form has replaced it. Socrates is really interested, not in the Form Name, which is extremely general (the characteristics that make an acceptable name, e.g., that it should reflect the nature of its nominatum and instruct), but in the Proper Forms of Name, in other words, the natural names that instruct us about individual things. Looking at the natural name of something is to examine, it seems, the thing’s nature; what the namegiver then tries to put into letters and syllables is the form of this natural name,⁵⁸ i.e., the ‘meaning’ of the nominatum, so that the resulting empirical name can fulfil its teaching function. Any attempt to see ontological significance in the distinction between the Form Name and Proper Form of Name is misguided; here, if anywhere, the sketchy outline of the theory presented to us cries out for further amplification.

The general line of argument seems highly Cratylan with the notion of an objective correctness of names that it takes skill to discover. Socrates then declares:

- (S6) two names consisting of different letters and syllables are qualitatively equivalent, so long as they both represent the same form, (389d8-390a7).

A Greek name and a barbarian name of completely different letters and syllables can be qualitatively equivalent by reproducing the same ‘idea’.⁵⁹ The suggestion that Greek and barbarian languages could be of equal merit was presumably quite a radical and provocative statement for Plato to make given the oft-repeated scorn of the Greeks for other races; hence the emphasis put upon it. This brings home the good part of Cratylus’ theory, the fact that the ability to speak a certain language does not give one a monopoly on the truth. Yet Socrates does not fall into the same traps as Cratylus. Again it is stressed that one looks to reality first then one gives names; success depends on one’s grasp of the ‘form of the Name’, i.e. one’s insight into the essence of the nominatum, and one’s linguistic skills. It is a τέχνη like any other; this entails

⁵⁷ Art. cit., note 11.

⁵⁸ 390a5-6, e2-4. αὐτοῦ in e3 refers to the name.

⁵⁹ For the Greeks/barbarians contrast cf 383b1 (Cratylus’ theory) and 385e3 (Hermogenes’ theory), and 390c3-4.

that there are good and bad craftsmen, from the true νομοθέτης who produces the best possible names at the top, to the many other lesser craftsmen below him. This scale of achievement is what Cratylus misses because he has not sorted out the distinction between a language of ideal names and one of ordinary names. Socrates' argument looks towards such an ideal but does not lose sight of the everyday reality.

It is important to stress this point about naming being a τέχνη, as it underlines the fact that Socrates' theory is abstract and prescriptive, positing a rational ideal that human language, if it is of any philosophical worth, will look towards, even if it fails to achieve it.⁶⁰ And in the course of the etymologies the point comes up again: Hermogenes describes the second etymology of ψυχή as τεχνικώτερον.⁶¹ Even if this is meant to be taken ironically (note Socrates' reaction to this comment), it remains true that what seems more to befit a τέχνη is a better etymology. And at 425a7ff after drawing an analogy with painting and doctoring, two other τέχναι, Socrates outlines what is the 'technical' approach to the πρῶτα ὀνόματα. He thinks it results in a ridiculous theory,⁶² but it is the product of necessity.⁶³

The theory that correct naming should ideally be attributed to the work of a skilled νομοθέτης is also subtly reinforced later on by Socrates' treatment of two alternative explanations, τὸ αὐτόματον and ἡ τύχη. An interesting contrast emerges: τύχη is put forward as being responsible perhaps for the name Ὀρέστης at 394e8-11 and for the name Τάνταλος at 395e1-5, whereas at 397a4-b1 the idea that names are as they are ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου is contrasted to them having τινὰ ὀρθότητα, and at 402b3 Socrates implicitly scorns the suggestion that Κρόνος and Πέα were given the names of streams 'spontaneously'. As in Aristotle's *Physics* II 4-6, chance is something that could be explained by human agency, the spontaneous cannot so be explained. Now at this point the hypothesis is being investigated that Greek approximates to the rational ideal of what languages should be like and so cannot be the product of mere spontaneity; τύχη is not necessarily incompatible with that rational ideal—it might be the expression of a providential world order—but τὸ αὐτόματον is far removed from the vision of a language produced from a knowledge both of reality and of the τέχνη of naming, which makes possible knowledge from names.

The final stretch of the argument starts from the claim that in every craft the user of something, be it shuttle or lyre or whatever, is better placed than the maker to know whether it is a good example of its type or not. In the case

⁶⁰ Cf Lorenz / Mittelstrass, art. cit., who regard the *Cratylus* as a blueprint for a 'rational philosophy of language'.

⁶¹ 400b5.

⁶² 425d1-3, 426b5-6.

⁶³ ἀνάγκη, 425d3.

of names, the products of the namegiver's work, the user is the one who knows how to ask and answer questions; this is none other than the *διαλεκτικός*; thus:

- (S7) the namegiver should have the *διαλεκτικός* as overseer if names are to be properly given (390d4-5).

The *διαλεκτικός* is a master of Socratic dialectic, able to see if the namegiver's practical linguistic skills have been well applied. Insight into reality is needed as well as those linguistic skills if names are to be properly given. Thus the language that a namegiver produces is not to be taken as gospel but subjected to scrutiny. Questions have to be asked of it. Contrast this with Cratylus' point-blank refusal to tell Hermogenes why *Hermogenes* is not his name.⁶⁴

After this argument the *διαλεκτικός* disappears from view.⁶⁵ This fact helps reinforce the point that the tool analogy passage outlines a prescriptive ideal: once we move into the etymologies we are thrust into the world of existing languages where there is no guarantee that a dialectician has been at work. Puzzles however remain. What is the exact relationship between him and the namegiver? And for that matter, between the two of them and the teacher? The answers to these puzzles will also, I believe, help solve wider problems.

We are given in the tool analogy argument a pattern of users and makers: the teacher in using names uses the products of the namegiver's art;⁶⁶ the namegiver makes names by attending to the Proper Form of Name and so on and then submits them to the dialectician, another user, for approval.⁶⁷ The fact that Socrates mentions two separate users should give pause for thought: are they necessarily separate? The dialectician is the man who knows how to ask and answer questions and thereby he refines the language, arriving at the correct names; the function of names is to teach; and so by this refining process the dialectician is the true teacher. And the true tools of teaching are not names *per se*,⁶⁸ but names tried and tested by questioning and answering, in other words, by Socratic dialectic. Once again Socrates' theory is carefully distanced from that of Cratylus, even though virtually in the same breath he appears to be supporting Cratylus.⁶⁹ Furthermore, if the dialectician can refine names, he can be a namegiver himself;⁷⁰ there is no need for teacher, namegiver and dialectician to be three separate men at all, rather the same man in three different rôles.⁷¹

⁶⁴ 383b8-384a4.

⁶⁵ Though ἥρωες are said to be *διαλεκτικοί* at 398d7.

⁶⁶ 388c5ff.

⁶⁷ 390b1ff.

⁶⁸ Contrast Cratylus' claim at 435d4-6.

⁶⁹ 390d9-e4.

⁷⁰ Note how during the course of etymologies Socrates does not assume that one and only one namegiver is responsible for names, eg οἱ παλαιοί at 418b7.

⁷¹ The Philosopher-King?

There are important morals to be drawn from this. One is the one already referred to above, that language must be subjected to scrutiny by means of the dialectical method of question and answer. The corollary of this is that we can be namegivers ourselves if we are prepared to do the appropriate dialectical work. We can take our existing language and subject it to a searching examination. Again this reaffirms that Socrates' theory is not a historical account of the origin of language, but a theory of the rational foundations for a philosophical language; in iconoclastic fashion Plato intends to change language and not describe it.

The second moral relates to the 'confusion' Robinson detected in Plato's failure to note the ambiguity in naming between naming as using a name and naming as imposing a new name. If in naming our allegiance should be to the nature of the *nominatum*,⁷² then every use of a name is at least the opportunity to reassess it and perhaps rename it. Every naming in theory represents the opportunity for a rebaptism.⁷³ We have seen how Cratylus' theory contributes to that of Socrates; I suggest that the freedom to baptize things afresh is a legacy from Hermogenes, only now one is subject to the demands of revealing the *nominandum*'s essence. Robinson's failure to see the ideal nature of the theory has misled him here.⁷⁴

Socrates has almost finished now. He declares that Cratylus is speaking the truth when he says that (i) names of things are φύσει and (ii) that only the man who can see the natural name for each thing and render it into letters and syllables is a craftsman of names.⁷⁵ (The latter claim is not specifically attributed to Cratylus by Hermogenes yet Socrates includes it as part of the content of what Cratylus has said; presumably he feels licensed to infer (ii) from what Hermogenes did say of Cratylus' theory and his development of the general line of thought.) This approval of Cratylus' theory should surprise the reader—is Cratylus really right? One needs to read on a little.

Hermogenes is impressed and unable to say anything against Socrates' argument, but is not convinced that he is right, remarking that it is perhaps not easy to be persuaded very quickly.⁷⁶ Plato would probably add: and not sensible

⁷² 387d4-9.

⁷³ One can now answer Ketchum's argument, *art. cit.*, note 3, that the dominant meaning of to name in 387-388 must be to use a name on the grounds that if the teacher creates names in naming there is nothing left for the namegiver to do; this objection loses its force if the namegiver, teacher and dialectician represent three facets of the same activity, philosophical naming.

⁷⁴ Another criticism of Robinson's ('Criticism', pp. 124-125)—to the effect that the whole argument rests on the easily deniable assertion that names are constructed like shuttles whereas in fact they are cultural artefacts handed down to us—is rejected by both Anagnostopoulos, *art. cit.*, pp. 719-720, and Ketchum, *art. cit.*, p. 139, who point out that we can and do on occasion 'make names', and that is all the argument needs.

⁷⁵ 390d9-e4.

⁷⁶ Cf 384c9ff where he declares that repeated discussions on the problem of the correctness of names had failed to shift him from his views.

either. One must be ready to inquire into such matters.⁷⁷ Hermogenes suggests that if Socrates showed him the exact correctness of names that he advocated he would be more easily convinced, to which Socrates replies with the traditional Socratic denial of knowledge. His argument was not so much a proof of a certain position but rather an exploration of the whole issue. This has shown that:

- (S8) names have a certain correctness by nature, and not everyone has the knowledge to assign names to things well (391a7-b2).

Now Socrates is ready to turn from the ideal prescription to the existing state of the language.

2.3 A Prescriptive Ideal

The tool analogy argument is thus an abstract theory outlining a rational basis for naming. Names *should* in some way or other name according to the nature of their nominata. The more ‘descriptive’ part of the dialogue, the examination of an existing language, is to come, where one will see that ordinary language and its demands are not necessarily at one with those of the philosophical ideal. If one accepts this distinction between prescription and description then one sees that some criticisms of the argument, that it does not measure up to the reality of language, miss the point: if language does not correspond to this model so much the worse for language, and any naming that men do should attempt to follow the pattern Socrates lays down, if they want their naming to have any general validity.

Socrates has provided a basic framework for the argument of the dialogue within which one can try various options. If names are to be teaching tools and divide up reality they must at some level be φύσει, given ‘according to nature’. Yet what in practical terms does that mean? It is important to stress that we do not yet know. Socrates says as much at 391a4-b2. The theory as it stands is interestingly indeterminate, and can be developed in different ways. What Socrates has apparently committed himself to is this general theory, not any specific theory of the correctness of names.⁷⁸ It is for this reason that too detailed

⁷⁷ Note the emphasis this receives in the following lines: σκεψοίμην, σκοποῦμένοις, 391a6; ζητέιν, b4; σκόπει, b7; σκοπεῖν, b8; σκέψεως, b9, and cf 1.4 above.

⁷⁸ Cf Kretzmann’s distinction between the general theory of naming outlined in the tool analogy argument and the special theory, a hypothesis developed and then refuted during the rest of the dialogue (see note 38 above). With this thesis I have much sympathy; more questionable is his claim that ‘Socrates is made to claim an important definite discovery’ (p. 133), based as it is on an over-translation: νῦν δὲ σκοποῦμένοις ἡμῖν, ἐμοί τε καὶ σοί, τοσούτου μὲν ἤδη φαίνεται παρὰ

claims about what Plato is advocating in the tool analogy argument should be avoided.

This does not mean however that Socrates' general outline of a theory is without important claims that need examination. One can appreciate these via the reactions of Hermogenes, for when he thinks that Socrates is advancing something new, or something that he is not sure of, he expresses his puzzlement or doubts. Thus there are hints in the reactions of Hermogenes during the course of the argument that Plato wants particular attention paid to the theses that he introduces at those points. Two passages stand out: at 388b7ff Socrates asks what function the name performs, given its status as a tool, to which question Hermogenes is at a loss; and at 388d6ff Hermogenes is unable to say whose work the teacher uses when he uses a name. The two claims introduced are, respectively, that names are tools for teaching and dividing up reality, and that the teacher uses the work of the νομοθέτης.

One can see here Plato pushing Hermogenes towards a particular view of language, namely, that it is, or at least should be, the product of rational deliberation, an attempt to put into language a view of the world. Note the difference again between this and Cratylan theory: Cratylus implicitly believes that the true language is there to be revealed in what appears to be a pseudo-mystic fashion, whereas Socrates posits a more scientific and rationalist approach.

The feeling that Plato is pushing Hermogenes towards a theory he does not as yet accept is reinforced by the observation that for the most part during this argument Socrates puts questions which he answers himself and then invites Hermogenes to assent to. These two points where the latter stumbles are almost the only two substantive questions that Socrates asks him; indeed when he introduces the figure of the διαλεκτικός it is again a case of Socrates inviting Hermogenes to agree to his suggestion. Thus Hermogenes' slight unease at the speed with which he has been led into what appears to be a very Cratylan position is understandable and should make the reader wary.

Such then is the prescriptive ideal of Socrates. Hermogenes cannot refute the theory that Socrates has outlined, but he is not totally sure of it; he wants to be told the precise nature of the natural correctness of names.⁷⁹ Socrates has put forward a highly abstract prescription for an ideal language; Hermogenes understandably wants to bring the discussion down to the level of an actual language, and is eager to co-operate in the examination of Greek. Socrates ironically calls learning from the Sophists the best way to proceed; since

τὰ πρότερα ... (391a6-8) is rendered by 'And now already something appears to us as we are looking, *something that we did not know before* (Kretzmann's italics) ...'; the words in italics are far too strong for παρὰ τὰ πρότερα, and thus Kretzmann should claim nothing so definite based on this mistranslation.

⁷⁹ 390e5-391a3.

Hermogenes has no money,⁸⁰ the next best option is to consult the most venerable teacher of the Greeks, Homer himself. Again Hermogenes needs guidance from Socrates, this time as to what Homer's contribution to linguistic science was; perhaps this again indicates that Plato is introducing a new claim. And what Plato is claiming Homeric licence for is nothing less than the distinction I have stressed between the prescriptive ideal and the descriptive reality, in terms of the distinction between the language of the gods and that of humans. This is made quite clear in 391d6-8: this distinction between divine and human tongues is to do with correctness of names, for the gods at any rate call things by their natural names.⁸¹

The rational approach to language of the tool analogy passage is not forgotten however. Thus at 392a1-3 Socrates asks Hermogenes whether it is not a noble thing to know in what way it is right for Homer to call the river *Ξάνθος* rather than *Σκάμανδρος*. In other words one needs to know how the correctness of names operates. One can see here a potential criticism of Homeric exegetes: it is not enough to know Homer's text, and to know that that name is correct; one must be able to *διδόναι λόγον*. The point is reiterated at 392a6-7: it is no mean feat of learning to be able to explain why one name is more correct for a particular bird than another.

Socrates retreats from birdlife to things closer to humans. Hermogenes cannot say which name was more correct for Hector's son in Homer's opinion; again, when Hermogenes is at a loss we should be wary of Plato introducing something new and possibly controversial. What he does is in line with the outline for an ideal language: men are wiser than women; Hector's son is called *Ἀστυάναξ* by the former, *Σκαμάνδριος* by the latter; the name that the wise use must be more correct than the one used by the foolish; therefore in Homer's opinion *Ἀστυάναξ* is the correct name.⁸²

The following step is to explain why the men are right. Homer himself hints at the answer when he says that Hector saved the city and walls of Troy; his son should be 'lord of the city' that his father preserved. The final step is to point out that *Ἑκτωρ* and *Ἀστυάναξ* are kingly names, and amount to the same thing; Hector and his son share the same regal essence. This then accords with the general principle that the offspring of a particular *γένος* shares the essence of that *γένος*, eg the offspring of a horse is a horse, unless something goes very wrong.⁸³

⁸⁰ Recall Socrates' humorous etymology at 384c3-6.

⁸¹ This use of Homer's authority to bolster one's argument is a case of Plato using a characteristic stratagem of Greek thinkers which he would elsewhere deplore; his use of it here is thus presumably ironical.

⁸² 392b3-d10.

⁸³ 392d11-393c6.

Whatever one thinks about the content of this argument, in form it recalls the rational ideal that Socrates has put forward. Men, being wiser, are more likely to be good namegivers, and the etymology of the men's name proves the point to Socrates' satisfaction. Furthermore, it is a rational principle of naming that father and son, being of the same genus, should have essentially similar names. The man who knows about naming understands the δυνάμεις of names, so that even when they differ greatly on the surface, as is the case with Ἑκτωρ and Ἀστυάναξ, he can see where the same δύναμις is revealed. Similarly, the doctor is not fooled by the different appearances of drugs and knows what power each has.⁸⁴ Namegiving and etymology thus constitute a skilled science based on rational principles, a τέχνη akin to medicine, and Socrates has lost no time in demonstrating how his abstract theorising can be given more concrete form.

Lastly note how Socrates does not claim that he has achieved anything more than at best insight into Homer's opinions about the correctness of names.⁸⁵ Homer might be right but we might have misinterpreted him, or he might have got things wrong anyway. The point that Plato is making becomes more obvious as one reads on: do not trust the authority of the written word, in any shape or form.

This prescriptive ideal is all very well one might say; but is it a good way of thinking about language? This general point now requires discussion.

2.4 *The Nature of the Ideal Language: Some Possible Objections to Plato*

I postponed discussion of the criticism that we do more with names than just describe things. This point is developed in Roy Harris' discussions of *surrogationalism* and *instrumentalism*.⁸⁶ The former is the belief that names are essentially surrogates for things; Harris sees the *Cratylus* as marking the first appearance in the Graeco-Roman branch of the Western tradition of this belief, which he sums up as follows:

Languages are ... surrogational systems, which provide the language-user with a set of verbal tokens which stand for, or take the place of, non-verbal items of various kinds. Accordingly, it is the relation between words and what they stand for which is central to understanding how languages work.⁸⁷

The tool analogy, which claims that names teach us about reality, is a prime example of this attitude. *Instrumentalism* on the other hand sees names not as depictions or representations of things, but instruments to achieve intentions,

⁸⁴ 394a7-b2.

⁸⁵ 393b1-6.

⁸⁶ R. Harris, *The Language-Makers* (London, 1980), 33-78.

⁸⁷ Op. cit., p. 33.

the furtherance of those intentions providing the link between name and thing. Names are tools, but perform a much wider range of tasks than (S3) allows. The difference between the instrumentalist view of names and that of the natural nomenclaturist is, says Harris, analogous to the difference between supposing a knife to be shaped as it is so as to cut things, and imagining it to be shaped so as to depict or represent somehow the cutting of what is cut.

Surrogationalism then is only part of what language is used for, description is only one of the tools of the language-user. It is thus, as Harris argues, a simplified version of *instrumentalism*. One can compare Plato to a workman who thinks that one particular tool will suffice to do any job, and is therefore embarrassed when called upon to do tasks requiring other equipment.

If one assumes that Plato has in mind at least in part descriptive linguistics then the verdict here must be that Plato is guilty of the simplifying move that Harris is talking about. There is much in this, and Plato cannot be completely saved from this charge; I would argue however that the lesson to be drawn from this is not that Plato is describing ordinary language incorrectly, but that he is prescribing what a philosophically ideal language would look like, in which case the idea of language as a mirror of the world has more plausibility. Again it is vital to draw the distinction between prescriptive and descriptive theories. Plato is interested in ordinary language only insofar as it reveals itself to be 'philosophically sound.'

This point can also be reinforced by a comparison with one of the leading 'ordinary language' philosophers, J. L. Austin. On several occasions in his work he pointed to etymology as a guide to elucidating a concept,⁸⁸ and in 'A Plea for Excuses' he offers a relevant defence of 'ordinary language philosophy': 'our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connections they have found worth making, in the lifetimes of many generations: these surely are likely to be more numerous, more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of the survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in all ordinary and reasonably practical matters, than any that you or I are likely to think up in our arm-chairs of an afternoon—the most favoured alternative method.'⁸⁹

John Cook Wilson made similar remarks and indeed asserts the superiority of 'ordinary language' over philosophical reasoning in many cases: 'a philosophical distinction is *prima facie* more likely to be wrong than what is called a popular distinction, because it is based on a philosophic theory which may be wrong in its ultimate principles.'⁹⁰

⁸⁸ See J.L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, edited by J.O. Urmson and G.J. Warnock, second edition (Oxford, 1970), pp. 201-203, 260, 283.

⁸⁹ Op. cit., pp. 181-186 (182).

⁹⁰ J. Cook Wilson, *Statement and Inference, with other Philosophical Papers*, edited by A.S.L. Farquharson, 2 volumes (Oxford, 1926), ii, pp. 874-875.

On first sight this seems rather similar to the etymological section of the *Cratylus*, in that Socrates explores the opinions of men of old and finds that they were addicted to flux. Socrates' theory however lays down that language should be the result of the application of philosophical wisdom to language in the form of the *διαλεκτικός* and *νομοθέτης* working together; unless a language like Greek is the offspring of such a union, scrutiny of the distinctions it makes and the like are not going to be of benefit. Plato does not at any point claim that the test of time is relevant, quite the reverse: the old language has been corrupted, not improved. He wants a philosophically well-grounded language. Greek as it stands, inasmuch as it was formed by means of philosophical reflection, was quite possibly based on bad philosophy.

Austin stresses that scrutiny of 'ordinary language' cannot claim to provide the last word on any philosophic problem, in that it can always be supplemented and improved, but it is the first word.⁹¹ The hypothesis of the etymological section is that, if Greek is a proper language, scrutiny of the meaning of names is the first, and possibly last, word. A third point is that Austin warns against expecting words in a particular field all to 'fit into place in some single, interlocking, consistent, conceptual scheme.' The haphazard way our language has developed, drawing its vocabulary from different civilizations, works against that idea.⁹² By contrast Socrates seems to be determined to fit everything into a Heraclitean mould by the end of the etymological section.⁹³

This leaves the possibility however that once the Cratylan version of naturalism is refuted Plato endorses something like Austin's view. It is true that he would endorse the third point, having shown that language does not necessarily reveal any consistent conceptual scheme, but this is all the more reason for him to be wary of scrutinizing language as a means, albeit only the first step, towards reaching the truth about things. Plato in other words is ready to imagine a considerable dislocation between reality and men's conception of reality. Plato combines this suspicion of the works of man with a rationalist faith that reason and philosophy can mend those works. His prescriptive, rationalist approach to language distances him from modern philosophers and etymologists alike, as the next chapter will try to show.

A philosophically ideal or logically perfect language will, it seems, inevitably be very different from ordinary language, as Russell cheerfully accepted.⁹⁴ Harris contrasts in this respect Austin to Russell; my point is merely that Russell is closer to Plato here.

⁹¹ Op. cit., p. 185.

⁹² Op. cit., p. 203, note 1.

⁹³ See 415d6-e1, cf 436b12-c6.

⁹⁴ B. Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, edited by D.F. Pears (La Salle, Illinois, 1985), pp. 56-59.

What however is a philosophically ideal language? Russell gives a rough definition in *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*:

In a logically perfect language the words in a proposition would correspond one by one with the components of the corresponding fact, with the exception of such words as 'or', 'not', 'if', 'then', which have a different function. In a logically perfect language, there will be one word and no more for every simple object, and everything that is not simple will be expressed by a combination of words, by a combination derived, of course, from the words for the simple things that enter in, one word for each simple component. A language of that sort will be completely analytic and will show at a glance the logical structure of the facts asserted or denied.⁹⁵

Plato is toying with the possibility of the names, the vocabulary of the language, giving access to essences, an additional demand on the language, but Russell's general outline is perhaps comparable to Plato's intention, a one-to-one fit between language and the world, with the structure of sentences mirroring the structure of the world.

What Russell goes on to say is that his logically perfect language is for practical purposes useless, being intolerably prolix and having a vocabulary largely private to one speaker. This is a consequence of his theory of logically proper names. Plato by contrast wants a language that will reveal the essences of τὰ ὄντα since essences, unlike private sense data, are objective, the private language problem that Russell's theory raised does not affect him.

Yet even if *surrogationalism* was acceptable for limited philosophical purposes, names, as noted above, do more than merely describe. And a language that did describe reality would leave nothing left to say. A point that Steiner makes forcefully in *After Babel* is relevant here. The very strength of language rests in its multivalency, the plurality of meanings that are latent in any particular word; artificial languages like Esperanto have a 'strong' correspondence between words and things but for most purposes are the weaker for it, unable to express more than mere generalities.⁹⁶ Thus Plato's ideal language would be quite unlike his dialogues, indeed it would rule out 'dialogue' as nothing really needs to be discussed; it is a τέλος to be aimed at, where language finally reflects the essences of things. The model, as with thinkers like Leibniz, would probably be a mathematical one.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there were various attempts to produce a 'universal character'—a language that would serve scientific, general and philosophical needs, laying open the structure of things. Cohen in his discussion of these attempts remarks that the whole enterprise was fatally undermined by failing to see that too much was being demanded of the

⁹⁵ Op. cit., p. 58.

⁹⁶ G. Steiner, *After Babel* (Oxford, 1975), p. 204f.

language. If the putative philosophically sound language is also to do duty as a general language for everyday use then the attempt is doomed to failure: what the sciences require from language is so different from what most people want from it that one language could never do service for both; indeed it is unlikely that the demands of the individual sciences are sufficiently similar even to allow for a single scientific language.⁹⁷ Plato is certainly vulnerable to criticism on these grounds.

The search for a universal language has failed; it demands, as Steiner puts it, 'not only a correct classification of "all primary units in the world" but requires proof that all such "simples" have indeed been identified and listed ... the image is that of Adam naming all that comes before him in a closed garden of perfect synonymy.'⁹⁸ If one has that however one hardly needs the new language.

Plato cannot completely evade these criticisms. One can allow him to escape at least some of the force of Cohen's attack if he intended to separate the philosophers' tongue from that of ordinary men, to be used for more mundane purposes. Certainly, as I have stressed, he saw the difference between the ideal and the actual languages. In general however his lack of interest in the descriptive side of language study did lead him to underestimate greatly the range of uses that language is put to, in favour of an overly rationalistic theory. That this is still a flaw in modern linguistics, namely the overvaluing of hypothetical language models and the devaluing of the study of the complexities of actual languages, is a theme that both Steiner and Harris pursue. In Chapter Three I shall compare Socrates' theory to some subsequent strains of language speculation, and speculate on Plato's views on the practicality of an ideal language.

⁹⁷ J. Cohen, 'On the Project of a Universal Character', *Mind* 63 (1954), 49-63.

⁹⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 204.

CHAPTER THREE

PLATO'S IDEAL THEORY: CONTRASTS AND COMPARISONS

In Chapter 2 I claimed that Socrates puts forward a prescriptive theory of naming in the tool analogy argument, a theory that is, however, as Socrates is at pains to point out,¹ a mere preliminary sketch. The etymological discussion of Greek names can then be read as an attempt to put the theory into practice. In this chapter I will discuss Socrates' ideal theory in action, trying to pin down more precisely the nature of his theory, and contrasting it with some more recent investigations into language. Thus in section 3.1 I contrast the *Cratylus* etymologies to modern etymology, arguing that, *pace* some recent etymological writers, the *Cratylus* is quite distinct from the modern discipline; then in 3.2 I will discuss some examples of language speculation of the seventeenth century, claiming that here we do find a good parallel with the *Cratylus*. Comenius' vision of *Monoglossia*, a single, ideal language, where names are in effect definitions of their nominata. This leads into a discussion of names as definitions in the *Cratylus*, where I argue that the move to the mimetic $\pi\rho\omega\tau\alpha$ theory can be interpreted as Plato pushing this notion of names as definitions as far as it can go, trying to make etymology into a form of real, rather than at best nominal, definition.² Then finally I shall make some suggestions as to whether Plato believed that such an ideal theory was a realizable goal.

A central aspect of this chapter is the claim that there are two different etymological methods on offer, firstly what I shall call the *semantic* method used throughout the main body of etymologies, and secondly the *mimetic* method, in other words the $\pi\rho\omega\tau\alpha$ $\delta\nu\omicron\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ theory. The former allows an embarrassment of riches in terms of possible etymologies of names, as Socrates ably demonstrates, the latter relatively few. To understand the difficulty in reconciling the two one need only reflect on the gulf that seems to separate Socrates' claim that the letters and syllables that constitute a given name do not matter, so long as the ἰδέα or εἶδος of the name is rendered correctly,³ and the fact that later letters receive fixed mimetic values of their own. Yet to compound the puzzle Socrates, far from pointing to the radical difference

¹ 391a4-b2.

² Real definition here means definition of things, nominal definition that of words.

³ 389d8-390a7, cf 394b2-c8.

between the methods, actually declares that there is just one correctness of names.⁴ His only concession to the difference between the two methods is to say that the mimetic requires a different τρόπος.⁵ One of my aims in this chapter is to explain why Plato should produce two apparently incompatible etymological methods, and how they might be reconciled.

3.1 *The Comparison with Modern Etymology:*

a) Modern Etymology and the Semantic Method

According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus the *Cratylus* stood at the head of the ancient etymological tradition;⁶ it heavily influenced the Stoics;⁷ and its 'method' set the tune for etymology up into the Middle Ages: 'Deutung der Wörter auf Grund willkürlicher Ideenassoziationen, rücksichtslose Behandlung des Lautgefüges, prinzipielle Unsicherheit, die sich in der Anführung verschiedener Deutungsmöglichkeiten äußert, lautsymbolische Überlegungen, usw.'⁸ It is indeed the *locus classicus* for ancient etymology. Hard though it might seem to find etymological principles in Socrates' efforts, Allen identifies several, including 'etymology by contraction', whereby 'each word is derived from two or more component words, no distinction being drawn between stem and inflectional endings: the only rule is that the first part of the first component, the last part of the last, and at least one letter of the middle components must be represented in the word under analysis.'⁹ Examples from the *Cratylus* include derivations of ἄηρ from ἀεὶ ῥεῖ,¹⁰ ἄνθρωπος from ἀναθρῶν ἄ ὄπωπε,¹¹ and Ποσειδῶν from ποσὶ δεσμός.¹² Another principle is that of

⁴ 422c7-9. Few commentators comment on the problem in reconciling the two methods; one who does is G. Genette, in his book *Mimologiques. Voyages en Cratylie* (Paris, 1976): 'Ces deux aspects du cratylisme originaire semblent voués désormais à fonctionner séparément, fût-ce chez le même auteur et dans le même texte, et la difficulté, voire l'impossibilité, de leur jonction sera l'une des croix de la doctrine.' (p. 39). By contrast, W.S. Allen, 'Ancient Ideas on the Origin and Development of Language', *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 1948 (1949), 35-60, thinks that the earlier etymologies were carefully chosen so as to fit in with the later πρῶτα ὀνόματα theory (p. 52).

⁵ 422b6-8.

⁶ *De compositione verborum* 16.

⁷ See K. Barwick, *Probleme der stoischen Sprachlehre und Rhetorik*, Abhandlungen der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, philologisch-historische Klasse, Band 49, Heft 3 (Berlin, 1957), 70-79.

⁸ W. Sanders, 'Grundzüge und Wandlungen der Etymologie', reprinted in *Etymologie*, edited by R. Schmitt, *Wege der Forschung* Band 373 (Darmstadt, 1977), 7-49 (p.12) (hereafter *Schmitt*).

⁹ Allen, art. cit., p. 54.

¹⁰ 410b2.

¹¹ 399c1-6.

¹² 402d11-e6.

paronymy, deriving an ἔτυμον with a very small change to the name under examination, for example γυνή is derived from γονή,¹³ θῆλυ from θηλή,¹⁴ βουλή from βολή.¹⁵ The possession of the merest similarity between name and ἔτυμον is enough to posit an etymological connection, leading to some very strange etymologies indeed; even Hermogenes finds it hard to believe that τέχνη for example is derived from ἕξις νοῦ.¹⁶

The blame for this according to Socrates lies however with those who have tried to τραγωδεῖν the original names, adding and taking away letters in a mistaken attempt to 'beautify' names, and caring nothing for the truth.¹⁷ Thus one arrives at another fundamental principle: the original imposition of names was the correct, or most nearly correct, imposition; hence older names are likelier to be closer to the truth than more recent ones, which have suffered all kinds of alterations over generations.¹⁸ This being so, the etymologist is licensed to assume virtually any variety of sound change, which means that any name can be linked to anything;¹⁹ the only check on his activities is a pragmatic one: ἀλλὰ τὸ μέτριον οἶμαι δεῖ φυλάττειν καὶ τὸ εἰκὸς σὲ τὸν σοφὸν ἐπιστάτην.²⁰

All this being said, the estimation of the etymologies of the *Cratylus* in comparison with other ancient examples which have come down to us is mixed.²¹ The verdict is unsurprisingly more unanimous when the methods of the *Cratylus* are compared to those of modern etymology. Here it is axiomatic that proper scientific etymology starts only with the nineteenth century, when phonetics and morphology were put on a sound footing, displacing semantics from the pedestal it had occupied for more than two thousand years, and comparative-historical methods came into their own. Since the ground-breaking work of Pott (1802-1877), Bopp, and others 'standen in Mittelpunkt etymologischer Forschung die lautliche und morphologische, daß heißt: die an der Beobachtung der Gesetzmäßigkeiten der Lautentwicklung und der bei der Stamm- und Formenbildung der Wörter wirksamen Regeln orientierte Rückführung auf eine rekonstruierte "Wurzel" als Ausgangspunkt und die

¹³ 414a3.

¹⁴ 414a4.

¹⁵ 420c3.

¹⁶ 414b6-c3.

¹⁷ 414c4-d4; cf 418a5-b1.

¹⁸ The contrast is made clearly at 418b1-d6; cf, eg, 426c3-4.

¹⁹ 414d7-9.

²⁰ 414e2-3. The σοφὸν ἐπιστάτην recalls 390d4-5 where the νομοθέτης is said to have the διαλεκτικός as ἐπιστάτης.

²¹ Allen, art. cit., p. 60, quotes the view that over half of the etymologies that Plato gives were justified in the light of the knowledge then available, and that around twenty (roughly one-sixth of the whole) stand the test of time, whereas Gaiser thinks that even by the standards of the time they were strange; see K. Gaiser, *Name und Sache in Platons Kratylus*, Abhandlungen der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften (philosophisch-historische Klasse) 1974, 3. Abhandlung, p. 45.

Vergleichung mit entsprechenden Wörtern und Formen der verwandten Sprachen.'²² In contrast, ancient, especially Greek etymology, was based on no historical study of the language itself, let alone comparative study of other languages.²³

The earlier scientific nineteenth century etymologists did not break completely with the past, for whilst concentrating on phonetics, they adhered at least to the ancient belief that etymology was the science of 'true meaning', the art of recapturing the intentions of the namegiver. This proved seldom possible, and so later the etymology of a word became the earliest known form and meaning of it or its hypothetical ancestor. Nothing but the starting point and terminal point of the word mattered. More recently semantic considerations have come back more into fashion, based on the solid base of phonology and morphology, and instead of just asking what the origin of a word is, etymologists have become more interested in the biography of a word. This is especially true in the Romance languages where the origin of the word—Latin—is usually assured and a wealth of documentation lies to hand. It is not enough on this view to say that the etymon of French *cuisse* was Latin *coxa*, one needs to explain the semantic change from *hip* to *thigh*.²⁴ Thus two different approaches, 'étymologie-origine' and 'étymologie-histoire du mot' have emerged,²⁵ though both terms need qualification: rarely can the original form of a word in a language be traced,²⁶ and the biography of a word relies on a reasonable amount of information for a given word being available, which in many cases is lacking.

Today etymology is an important part of historical and comparative linguistics. However, in general theoretical linguistics it is largely ignored.²⁷ First structural, then generative linguistics have addressed almost exclusively problems of synchronic description, whereas etymology is arguably the only inalienably diachronic variety of linguistic investigation.²⁸ Much work in theoretical linguistics still has many points of contact with problems in philosophy and psychology, but at the level of, for example, syntactic structure rather than the individual word. The position of etymology in modern linguistics is described by Lyons thus: 'As it [sc. etymology] is nowadays practised,

²² *Schmitt*, pp. 2-3.

²³ *Schmitt*, p.1.

²⁴ See K. Baldinger, 'L'Étymologie hier et aujourd'hui', reprinted in *Schmitt*, pp. 213-246 (pp. 219-222); O. Szemerényi, 'Principles of Etymological Research in the Indo-European Languages', reprinted in *Schmitt*, 286-346 (pp. 286-294). See also S. Ullman, 'Semantics and Etymology', in *Language and Style: Collected Papers* (Oxford, 1964), 29-49 (p. 40).

²⁵ The terms are Baldinger's, art. cit.

²⁶ J. Lyons, *Language and Linguistics* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 56.

²⁷ Yakov Malkiel, 'Etymology and General Linguistics', in *Schmitt*, 347-376 (pp. 347-349).

²⁸ Y. Malkiel, 'Etymology and Modern Linguistics', *Lingua* 36 (1975), 101-120 (p. 102). I shall discuss a dissenting view below.

it is a respectable branch of historical, or diachronic, linguistics.²⁹ The use of 'respectable' is revealing: etymology has been freed from its disreputable (Platonic!) past, but has lost the position of eminence in linguistic investigation that it once held.

There is another fundamental reason for the neglect of etymology in theoretical linguistics however, namely the inexact nature of the discipline. The accuracy of any etymological reconstruction depends on the evidence available, and this is frequently highly unsatisfactory.³⁰ Thus Michel Bréal remarked that 'if we could miraculously lay hands upon this oft-quoted Indo-European tongue, we should see how little it resembled the picture we have drawn of it.'³¹ In addition, for all the advances made in etymological methods, so-called laws can let one down; anomalies abound.³² The result is that etymology requires not only a sound grounding in phonology, morphology and semantics but also ingenuity and a willingness to make bold conjectures so as to cover gaps in the evidence and to account for apparent abrupt changes.³³

Yet despite the unavoidably inexact nature of modern etymology, its reconstructions are immeasurably superior to Plato's hit or miss efforts, due to more than 150 years of patient comparative philology. Socrates is concerned with the foundations of a philosophically sound language, and so is interested in the actions of the putative original namegiver of Greek; today linguists are concerned with language in its own right, not as a route to knowledge, and can ignore the wisdom or otherwise of the original namegiver or givers. For the notion of the creation of an ideal language one has to look elsewhere. The difference in a nutshell is that between a prescriptive theory about how language should work, and the attempt to explain how languages in fact do operate.³⁴

Yet despite the apparent huge gulf separating Plato and modern etymology, some etymologists have tried to link the two in the context of what Vendryes called 'etymologie statique'. Earlier I remarked that etymology is usually regarded as the one means of linguistic investigation that lacks a synchronic

²⁹ Op. cit., p. 55.

³⁰ See Malkiel in *Schmitt*, p. 351.

³¹ Michel Bréal, 'On the Canons of Etymological Investigation', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 24 (1893), 17-28 (p. 19).

³² V.I. Abaev, 'Die Prinzipien etymologischer Forschung', in *Schmitt*, 177-199 (pp. 188-191).

³³ Though the grounding in phonology and the rest comes first; as Malkiel puts it, 'Significant conjectures are not known to occur to the uninitiated; it takes a mind not only plastic and versatile, but thoroughly attuned to pending etymological problems (as a rule, through long, systematic exposure to specialized teaching or to technical literature) to respond at once to the challenge of a "hunch"' (*Schmitt*, p. 352).

³⁴ This raises the question, how far Plato was interested in making ordinary language philosophical; cf my discussion in 2.4 of the criticism often made of universal/ideal language schemes, namely that the demands made upon a philosophical or scientific language are quite different from those made on ordinary language.

element; some years ago however Vendryes questioned this notion. He pointed to a possible precedent for distinguishing a synchronic form of etymology in the doctrines of a certain group of Indian grammarians, the *Mimamsa*, who contrasted the study of the etymology or derivation of a word (*yoga*) to that of its conventionally established usage (*rudhi*), and insisted that the latter should always take precedence if there was any discrepancy in the word-meanings arrived at by the two methods. The former could only be of importance if usage could not be established.³⁵

In the spirit of *rudhi* Vendryes outlined some principles of etymologie statique: 'L'histoire est rigoureusement exclue de l'étymologie statique, dont la tâche est de fixer la valeur sémantique des mots à l'intérieur d'une langue et à un moment donné strictement limité.' (This is much more difficult than dealing with the order and regularity of phonetics and grammar.) 'Il s'agit de définir la place que tient chaque mot dans l'esprit, d'en circonscrire la signification et l'emploi, d'en calculer la fréquence, d'en apprécier la valeur évocatrice, d'en marquer les rapports qui l'unissent aux autres mots. C'est une sorte d'inventaire du monde intérieur que chacun porte en lui.'³⁶

One part of this static etymology is popular etymology, the positing of connections that are contradicted by the data of history involving phonetic, orthographic or semantic modifications in the words concerned.³⁷ Which brings in the *Cratylus*, mentioned with favour by Vendryes. It is not illogical, he maintains, that Plato frequently suggests several etymologies for the same word: 'c'est simplement la preuve qu'un même mot peut évoquer des associations dans des plans différents.'³⁸ Chantraine goes so far as to say that the *Cratylus* etymologies represent a useful approach to the truth; for most people at a given time the origin and history of a word is not so important as what it evokes, the network of relations with other words that it calls to mind.³⁹

There are two problems with static etymology that leap to mind. Firstly, it is an even more inexact science than historical etymology, and secondly, is this really 'etymology'?⁴⁰ Of more pressing interest however is the comparison with the *Cratylus*. Here it seems safe to say that Vendryes and Chantraine have

³⁵ J. Vendryes, 'Pour une Etymologie Statique', *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris*, 49 (1953), 1-19. The doctrines of the *Mimamsa* and their relevance to etymology was first discussed, as Vendryes acknowledges, by F. Edgerton in 'Etymology and Interpretation', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 79 (1938), 705-714.

³⁶ Art. cit., p. 7. See also S. Ullman, art. cit. (n. 24), pp. 30-35.

³⁷ Ullman, 'Etymology', p. 35, remarks: 'If historical and static etymology, *yoga* and *rudhi* coincide, there is no problem; if they differ and the synchronic associations prevail, then we have a case of popular etymology.'

³⁸ Art. cit., p. 11.

³⁹ P. Chantraine, 'Etymologie Historique et Etymologie Statique', in *Schmitt*, 389-404.

⁴⁰ Malkiel regards it as a branch of lexicology, 'Etymology and Modern Linguistics', p. 102; R.G.G. Coleman describes it as being complementary, rather than an alternative to diachronic etymology (personal conversation).

totally misunderstood the rationale of Plato's approach. He is not interested in what the name means to contemporaries but what it meant to the putative original namegiver.⁴¹ The fact that he often gives at least two alternative etymologies merely shows that as things stand he cannot find out which does in fact reflect the intention of that namegiver. Vendryes and Chantraine assume that Plato is interested in descriptive linguistics in some sense, but that is not so, or at least only inasmuch as description confirms or refutes the hypothesis that Greek is a natural language. The moral to draw again is that description is to be distinguished from the abstract prescription.

Malkiel argues forcefully that the gulf between modern etymology and general linguistics is damaging to both sides;⁴² the gulf between the former and Socrates' etymological exploration of his nature theory however is even greater. Modern etymology, secure in its place in diachronic linguistics, cannot offer much illumination of Plato's ideal theory; for that we must look elsewhere.

b) The Mimetic Method

One area that seems worth investigating for illumination into the mimetic $\pi\rho\omega\tau\alpha \delta\nu\acute{o}\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ theory is modern research into semantic universals, more specifically sound-symbolism.⁴³ This is divided by Ullman into primary and secondary onomatopoeia, the former being uncontroversial, imitation of sound by sound, whilst the latter consists of non-acoustic experiences, for example movement, size, emotive overtones and the like, being represented by sounds. Of the former sort, the cuckoo has similar onomatopoeic names, not only in many Indo-European languages but also in Finno-Ugrian ones as well: French *coucou*, Spanish *cucillo*, Italian *cuculo*, German *Kuckuck* etc; Hungarian *kakuk*, Finnish *kaki*, Zyrian *kok*. Verbs for snoring usually contain a *lrl* sound (*snore*, *schnarchen*, *ronfler* etc). Ullman has more examples.

More interesting is the secondary variety. An example is the symbolic value of the vowel *lil* as an expression of smallness—*little*, *slim*, *wee*; *petit*; *piccolo* etc. Contrast however *big-small* and Russian *velikij-malen'kij*. Ullman also cites poetic examples of a sequence of lateral consonants producing an effect of softness.

Turning to the *Cratylus*, there do seem to be parallels: $\iota\omega\tau\alpha$ represents things that are λεπτά, *thin*, *small*, *delicate*, *refined*; $\lambda\acute{\alpha}\beta\delta\alpha$ represents *smoothness*, *shinyness*, etc.⁴⁴ These are not too far away from the modern examples,

⁴¹ Hence the preference for the old over the new, see note 18.

⁴² See the articles cited.

⁴³ See S. Ullman, 'Semantic Universals', in *Language and Style*, 63-96 (pp. 68-71).

⁴⁴ 426e6-427a1; 427b2-5.

even if other semantic values that Plato gives are rather less plausible.⁴⁵ Yet in the examples Ullman gives it is the impression that the sound makes upon the listener that counts, a (perhaps) universal response to a particular stimulus, whereas the values given for the *πρῶτα ὀνόματα* in the *Cratylus* are arrived at in a crucially different manner. This needs further explanation.

At 422d11-423b12 Socrates draws an analogy between how one can *δηλοῦν* things, eg τὸ ἄνω καὶ τὸ κοῦφον, τὰ κάτω καὶ τὰ βαρέα and ἵππον θέοντα ἢ τι ἄλλο τῶν ζώων, without words by means of hand movements and suchlike, and how one can achieve a *δήλωμα* of something with voice, tongue and mouth, ὅταν μίμημα γένηται διὰ τούτων περὶ ὁτιοῦν. This analogy must be borne in mind when considering 426-7: ῥῶ, δέλτα, ταῦ, λάβδα and γάμμα are all explained in terms of the mimetic power of the tongue in producing those sounds; νῦ, σῖ, ἄλφα and ἦτα, can be explained in terms of the movements of the tongue and mouth or just the mouth,⁴⁶ and φεῖ, ψεῖ, σίγμα and ζῆτα in terms of the *φωνή*.⁴⁷ Only ἰῶτα of the examples Socrates gives seems resistant to interpretation in terms of the trinity Socrates puts forward at 423b4. It is not a question of the mimetic effect that a given sound has on the listener or listeners, rather the mimetic effect of a given means of producing a sound. Thus ῥῶ imitates motion not because of the sound of rolling 'r's as such, but because the motion of the tongue is at its quickest in producing that sound; the rolling motionful sound is derivative from the tongue's motion.

Here we are being reminded of the prescriptive world of the tool analogy argument. Again the picture is of the rational namegiver using a name as a tool to teach with, in this case choosing a particular objective feature of the production of sounds to decide what any particular sound represents. This is made clear at 426d3-6: τὸ δὲ οὖν ῥῶ τὸ στοιχεῖον ... καλὸν ἔδοξεν ὄργανον εἶναι τῆς κινήσεως τῷ τὰ ὀνόματα τιθεμένῳ πρὸς τὸ ἀφομοιοῦν τῇ φορᾷ, πολλαχού γοῦν χρῆται αὐτῷ εἰς αὐτήν. A two-stage process is

⁴⁵ Cf Allen, art. cit., p. 52; J-L Perpillou, 'Verbes de Sonorité à Vocalisme Expressif en Grec Ancien', *Revue Etudes Grecques* 95 (1982), 233-274, uses the *Cratylus* to support his thesis that in a certain group of Greek verbs concerned with the emission of sounds the vowels have an expressive force directly related to the nature of their articulation, e.g. ἰῶτα with a close front unrounded articulation is a quiet sound, usually connotating favourable things, whereas ἄλφα requires the maximum amount of aperture of the mouth amongst the vowels and so is a 'large' sound, usually connotating unfavourable things. Perpillou claims that Plato was well aware of this phenomenon.

⁴⁶ For the 'internal' pronunciation of νῦ, cf Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who refers to the 'tongue rising to make contact with the edges of the teeth' (*de compositione verborum* 22, quoted by W.S. Allen, *Vox Graeca*, third edition (Cambridge, 1987), p. 33); for the pronunciation of ἄλφα and ἦτα, see Perpillou's comments, art. cit.

⁴⁷ This quartet of sounds gain their imitative power from the explosion of breath required in their pronunciation (427a27).

envisaged: the namegiver decides that the sound represented by the letter ρῶ 'fits the depiction of motion, then he puts that decision into effect in his naming (Socrates speculates as to the reason at 426e4-6). The only substantive difference between the tool analogy passage and this one is that now the name is a πρῶτον ὄνομα. Socrates is still exploring the hypothesis that Greek is a naturally correct language, and so he picks out examples that support his particular attributions; his explanations however are put in terms of the means of producing sounds. What counts is that the theory shows itself to be the production of deliberation on the part of the namegiver. It is not inconceivable that he could have chosen another feature and arrived at another value for a given sound; in this respect the decision is inevitably somewhat arbitrary.

This raises the question, why do things this way around? Why not present, as Ullman does, examples of secondary onomatopoeia? One explanation is that Plato wants to reinforce the notion of naming being a skilled activity. If the mimetic values of πρῶτα ὀνόματα relied on the impression that they make on the listener, anyone could be a namegiver. If someone says that ρῶ connotes motion because of its sound, he has not given a proper explanation such as befits a namegiver. Compare Socrates' rejection of pseudo-explanations for the correctness of the first names: αἱταὶ γὰρ ἂν πᾶσαι ἐκδύσεις εἶεν καὶ μάλα κομψαὶ τῷ μὴ ἐθέλοντι λόγον διδόναι περὶ τῶν πρώτων ὀνομάτων ὡς ὀρθῶς κείται.⁴⁸

A more important reason however is to keep language in its place. The mimetic values of the πρῶτα are decided by the namegiver; another sage could choose differently. Names are our tools, to be used, resharpener, replaced as the namegiver/dialectician sees fit, and as his knowledge of their nominata grows. If one fails to grasp this point one is in danger of over-valuing names, of taking their present state as the ideal and allowing them to determine the nature of their nominata. (Cratylus is the prime example of this inverting of the priority of thing to name.) In theory, if Greek were an ideal language and one knew how to etymologize it correctly, this would not be a problem; as it is, we are not in that unfallen state, and languages are corrigible.

This interpretation then helps to solve the paradox that arises when one compares Socrates' declaration at 389d8-390a7 that syllables in themselves are of little intrinsic value with the mimetic theory of 421-7, where letters (and at least one syllable) are given mimetic values of their own. The mimetic values are not incorrigible but depend upon the decision of the namegiver, who could alter them; different namegivers could choose different values for particular sounds, thus allowing for a variety of languages. This means that there is no logical necessity to have just one true language, and that, in a sense, letters and syllables still do not have an intrinsic mimetic value: any values they bear

⁴⁸ 426a1-3.

remain partially contingent upon the decision of the namegiver. In any case, the appearance of paradox is partially a result of the movement of the argument; Socrates and we the readers progress in understanding as the dialogue continues, and so come to see that for naturalism to have a firm basis we need to pay attention above all to the elements. For as Socrates says, if one does not understand the correctness of the first names, one cannot understand that of the secondary ones made up out of them.⁴⁹

A gulf exists therefore between modern linguistic investigations and the *Cratylus*. More fruitful comparison can be made with some of the products of another period of language speculation before the scientific age of etymology dawned.

3.2 Language Speculation

In the language speculations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries one finds much of interest, ranging from mysticism in the form of adherents to the Adamic language doctrine, to various attempts by thinkers such as Leibniz, Bishop Wilkins and the Czech Comenius to arrive at a 'universal character' and philosophical languages.⁵⁰ These in various ways, inspired at least in part by the example of the *Cratylus*, analyse language down to $\pi\rho\omega\tau\alpha$.⁵¹ Comparing the *Cratylus* to this era of language speculation reveals both interesting similarities and important differences.

There are two broad strands of language speculation which I will briefly consider. The first is based on the belief that actual languages or a particular language are natural languages in some sense or other, or are at least based on a natural mimetic base,⁵² the second is formed by various attempts to produce a language more or less from scratch, based on a 'proper' understanding of the 'natural classes' of reality. (Again the prescriptive-descriptive distinction is

⁴⁹ 426a3-6.

⁵⁰ A *universal character* should be distinguished from a *philosophical language*; the former is a set of written symbols to be interpreted in a speaker's own language, the latter is a notation with its own pronunciation spanning the whole of human knowledge, dividing it up into conceptual classes.

⁵¹ This period of language speculation is extensively discussed in Hans Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (London, 1982); M.M. Slaughter, *Universal Languages and Scientific Taxonomy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1982); V. Salmon, *The Study of Language in Seventeenth-Century England*, Amsterdam Studies in the History of Linguistics, 17 (Amsterdam, 1979). See also J. Cohen, 'On the Project of a Universal Character', *Mind* 63 (1954), 49-63. Also of interest is A. Barton, *The Names of Comedy* (Oxford, 1990), which discusses strategies of naming in Jonson and Shakespeare, pointing out their classical antecedents, including the *Cratylus*.

⁵² See Genette, *op. cit.* (note 4), for discussions of various philosophers, philologists and poets who have been tempted by the mimetic thesis.

relevant.) This being a wide topic my remarks will be necessarily restricted to a very few examples that seem to have some bearing on the *Cratylus*, which on first sight might appear to lend some support to devotees of both varieties of language speculation.

As far as the former strand is concerned, there is a great disparity in sophistication between the two examples I shall discuss. The cruder theory is the Adamic doctrine.⁵³ Its adherents held that languages, despite their apparent discrepancies, still retained elements of the original perfect language created by Adam in the Garden of Eden, as told in *Genesis* 2. The relation between signifier and signified is not arbitrary; languages, being in fundamental accord with nature, are divine and natural and offer a route to knowledge of nature which can be better than that offered by man's self-deceptive senses. Adam took his place as the first and greatest both of philosophers and etymologists. Aarsleff continues: 'Of course this precious inheritance did not lie open in the light of day; it was an esoteric doctrine. But with the stakes so high and the authority unrivalled, it is no wonder that mystics, scholars, and etymologists went to work to recapture the hidden truth and the living powers of words.'⁵⁴ Interestingly, Leibniz referred to such men on occasion as 'platonici'.⁵⁵

One of the most important proponents of this doctrine was Jacob Boehme (1575-1624). He believed that he had been granted special insight into the Adamic language by God's grace. In his moments of inspiration words regained their state of grace and gave him direct revelations of the nature of things. Thus scientific knowledge was possible through the proper study of names.

Locke, and with him important members of the fledgling 'Royal Society for the Promotion of Natural Knowledge' (founded 1660) saw this view of language, if Aarsleff is right, as an important enough threat to the new science to warrant attack. For if it were correct, the study of 'gold' would reveal gold's essence as opposed to the study of gold itself.⁵⁶ Locke on the other hand maintained that names at best gave us the nominal essence.

The mysticism of Boehme calls to mind Euthyphro in the *Cratylus*,⁵⁷ and perhaps Cratylus himself, whose obscure utterances Hermogenes is at a loss to interpret.⁵⁸ Yet the extremism of this position was by no means shared by all. Locke's great *Essay* was given a systematic critique by Leibniz, who was fascinated by etymology.⁵⁹

⁵³ Aarsleff, pp. 25-26.

⁵⁴ Aarsleff, p. 26; see also p. 260.

⁵⁵ Aarsleff, p. 87. See also p. 97, note 13 for Leibniz' dismissal of Boehme's ideas.

⁵⁶ Aarsleff, pp. 24-27, 55-57.

⁵⁷ See 396c6-397a1, 399a1-5, 407d8-9, 409d1-2 and 428c6-8.

⁵⁸ 384a4-5.

⁵⁹ See G.W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, translated and edited by P. Remnant and J. Bennett (Cambridge, 1981), Book III, chapter ii, 'Of the Signification of Words' (pp. 278-287); Aarsleff, pp. 84-100.

Leibniz believed firmly in 'the common origin of all nations and in a primitive root language'; migrations of people and the passage of time had led to the many and various tongues of modern times. Lacking the original language itself one could not say whether the connections that language involved were grounded in 'reality' (*raisons physiques*), or a wise arbitrary imposition, but one could discern primitive elements in existing languages: 'This [sc. primitive element] has come to them along the way, in connection with new root words created in our language by chance but for reasons which are grounded in reality.'⁶⁰ For languages, Leibniz held, 'have a certain natural origin, from the agreement of sounds with the disposition of the mind [or 'affects'], which the appearance of things excite in the mind. And this origin I believe occurs not merely in the primal language, but also in languages that have grown up later in part from the primal language and in part from the new usage of men dispersed over the globe.'⁶¹ Examples follow.⁶² Secondary onomatopoeia is used by Leibniz—'r' he suggested signifies violent motion, whereas 'l' signifies a gentler one. Apparent counter-examples like *lion*, *linx* and *leopard*, which are hardly gentle creatures, can be explained perhaps by people seizing upon another of their characteristics, namely their speed. In any case 'various accidents and transformations have left most words greatly changed and far removed from their original pronunciation and signification.'⁶³ Closer still to the $\pi\rho\omega\tau\alpha\ \delta\acute{o}\nu\omicron\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ of the *Cratylus* is the suggestion that *nose* appropriately begins with an 'n' because this sound itself is pronounced through the nose.⁶⁴ Leibniz felt he could 'mention any number of similar terms which prove that there is something natural in the origin of words- something that reveals a relationship between things and the sounds and motions of the vocal organs.'⁶⁵

Leibniz, however, differed in various ways from mystics like Boehme. Firstly, he rejected the notion that the primitive language was Adam's creation, in fact being agnostic about the precise origin of language; secondly, he did not believe that his illustrations could be regarded as facts but rather as speculative suggestions as to the nature of the primitive language. Thirdly, his etymological speculations were based on information from a much wider range of languages

⁶⁰ *New Essays*, p. 281.

⁶¹ Quoted in Aarsleff, p. 88.

⁶² *New Essays*, pp. 281ff. Latin *coaxare* ('to croak') is linked to German *couaquen* or *quaken* which then form the root of other words, e.g. *quakeler* ('babblor') because of the noise frogs make; *quek* ('life', 'living'), *quek-silber* ('quicksilver'), *erquicken* ('to succour'), *quickly*, etc, because 'those sounds or noises of animals testify to the presence of life, and tell us that something living is there before we can see it.'

⁶³ Cf the assumption made by Socrates in the *Cratylus* that names have lost and gained letters over the generations, e.g. at 414c4-e3.

⁶⁴ Aarsleff, p. 89.

⁶⁵ *New Essays*, p. 283.

than his contemporaries saw fit to consider. And fourthly he believed that etymology could only become a science when a vast amount of material from different languages and dialects had been gathered and subjected to careful analysis. Contemporaries felt free to compare any two words in different languages however far distant, for example, Persian with modern Greek, and add, subtract and transpose letters at will, thereby 'proving' that the original language spoken in the Garden of Eden was Swedish or Flemish etc. Leibniz believed that 'one must interrelate the languages of various peoples, and one should not make too many leaps from one nation to another remote one unless there is sound confirming evidence—especially evidence provided by intervening peoples. In general, one should put no trust in etymologies unless there is a great deal of concurrent evidence.'⁶⁶

Leibniz, with his emphasis on the collection of material from a wide range of languages and his cautious attitude towards etymological speculation, seems in some ways closer to more scientific etymologising. Yet, as Aarsleff shows, his etymologising is part of his philosophy, and not a mere philological pastime. Leibniz had a particular view of man and his relation to language; he hoped that etymological study would yield up the secrets of the foundation of language. Convinced that 'languages are the best mirror of the human mind', he saw analysis of the meaning of words as a route to understanding the operations of the mind.⁶⁷ Plato by comparison did not look at languages other than Greek, and has it seems grave doubts as to how far the study of language can aid philosophy. Yet the inquiry into Greek can be seen as an investigation into the Greek mind, the way in which Greeks conceived of things. Whilst Leibniz set much store by the collection of data, Plato took the attitude that if ordinary language did not fit the prescription it should be laid aside as a serious tool of study. Perhaps Leibniz would have taken a similar line if he had ever felt he had assembled enough evidence to disprove his fundamental convictions about the universal harmony of all languages.

To sum up, both men explore the hypothesis that etymology can suggest answers to questions extending far beyond the origin of a particular word. The difference in a nutshell is that Leibniz believed that some sort of harmony exists between reality and language (justifying a more 'descriptive' approach to studying language), whereas Plato is less sanguine, pointing to the need for a namegiver guided by the demands of dialectic. Without that, the results of language study are unlikely to be very illuminating.

For a close parallel to the *Cratylus* one must examine an example of a philosophical language. In his *Panglottia* of about 1660 John Amos Comenius (1592-1670) posited the principles of a universal language and added his

⁶⁶ *New Essays*, p. 285.

⁶⁷ Aarsleff, p. 90.

Tentamen or first attempt at producing such a language.⁶⁸ His avowed aim was to repair the ruins of Babel and re-establish peace, harmony and the knowledge of God in all quarters of the world. Full achievement of that aim had to await the coming of *Pansophia*, universal wisdom, but the main features of the language could be established, drawing on the best features of existing languages. It should be noted straightaway that Comenius twice refers to the *Cratylus*,⁶⁹ and shows indications of having been influenced by the dialogue. His scheme can be seen as a self-conscious attempt to construct a philosophical language.

Comenius outlines his perfect language thus: 'Requirit ergo lingua perfecta tria haec. I. Ut totum rerum systema (visibilium et invisibilium) nomenclaturis consignetur, nulla vel minima re innominata relicta. II Ut totum etiam systema sonorum (quos lingua et os hominum formare potest) significationibus rerum adhibeatur; nullo vel minimo sono absque certo significato relicto. III Ut totum variationum systema (quae in sonis deprehendi possunt) ad harmoniam reducatur; nulla vel minima rerum, conceptuum, sonorumque differentia omitta.'⁷⁰ This language will then express the nature of things, serve as an instrument for disseminating wisdom, act as an international auxiliary language, etc.⁷¹ It will maintain constant harmony of names and things, with simple things expressed simply, harsh ones harshly, etc; and things of a cognate nature will be named with cognate sounds.⁷² Thus Comenius makes critical remarks similar to those made by Socrates on the habit of naming people inappropriately: 'a sinner may be called Pious, a tyrant Clement ...'⁷³

No redundancy of letters was to be allowed, but every part of the word, beginning with letters and syllables, was to signify something, with every word bearing only its predetermined meaning. 'Habebit enim et suum materiale, thema seu radicem; et suum formale, differentiarum complexum, per meras characterum (literarum et syllabrum) adjectionem et traiectionem; quibus significatio vocis ad rei ipsius naturam prorsus determinabitur.' This will mean that these words are proper definitions of their nominata.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ *Panglottia*, pars V of *De Rerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Catholica*, editio princeps, 2 volumes (Prague, 1966), ii pp. 147-204. All references are to this edition. I have used an English translation—*Panglottia, or Universal Language*, translated by A.M.O. Dobbie (Shipston-on-Stour, 1989)—and checked it against the above.

⁶⁹ One of the reasons Comenius gives for rejecting Greek as the best available language is that 'Radices suas . . . non intellegit, ut ex Platonis Cratylus patet' (p. 166); and in the *Tentamen*, *De Nominibus et Pronominibus*, he refers to the *Cratylus* for the view that 'Recta Nominis ratio est, quae qualis quaeque res sit, ostendit' (p. 198).

⁷⁰ Chapter iii, section 7, p. 158.

⁷¹ Chapter vi, section 17, p. 168.

⁷² Chapter vii, section 7, p. 171.

⁷³ p. 172, cf *Cratylus* 397b1-7.

⁷⁴ p. 173.

The *Tentamen* then puts these principles into operation. The new language, to be achieved by man's efforts, not any divine gift, will aim to surpass all existing languages in expressing essences and properties as precisely as possible,⁷⁵ proceeding from letters upwards. Comenius suggests values for his letters, some of which chime with the *Cratylus* whilst others do not.⁷⁶ He goes further in suggesting values for letters in denoting *position, order, quantity* and *shape*.⁷⁷ When it comes to naming naturally things that are non-material or in any other way difficult to represent in sound, these can always be related to sounds by analogy. Even spiritual things are in some sense hard or soft, rough or smooth, and so on, and can therefore be represented.⁷⁸

The thoroughness of Comenius' system emerges again when one sees his suggestions for the natural order of the alphabet. Vowels should precede consonants because they are easier to pronounce, and consonants are ordered according to how deep in the chest they are formed. Many other examples could be given. The aim of the system is simplicity; from two or three hundred stems, all referring directly to things or modes of action, one can add various letters and syllables to define a thing, and construct an infinite number of words to express ideas and things. After a certain amount of practice the new language will be easy to decipher.⁷⁹

This then is an example of the kind of philosophical (and general) language that Plato was perhaps envisaging. It proceeds on a rational basis, often giving reasons for why letters and syllables should have the values they either do or should have, for why vowels are prior to consonants (ease of pronunciation), and so on. This does not mean that the available languages are ignored, far from it, rather that Comenius has used his knowledge of other languages to establish rational criteria for the ideal one. Comenius did not intend his language to replace all other languages, at least not for a long time; he discusses two less satisfactory alternatives to the single language (*Monoglottia*): raising to a more developed state all the languages of the world (*Pantoglottia*); or at least the principal ones (*Polyglottia*). And *Pansophia* would have to reign before the single language could be truly created.

⁷⁵ p. 189

⁷⁶ Thus A denotes 'vastum quid et grande'; O 'rotunditatem, claritatem et universalem'; L 'mollia'; R 'dura; item liquidas et claras, sonoras'; F 'cum sit flatus vehemens servetur motibus celeribus'; and H 'cum sit halitus reservetur spiritualibus.' (pp. 191-2.)

⁷⁷ Some examples: A indicates the highest, the first, large quantities and square shapes; U the lowest, the last, small quantities and 'level' shapes; I indicates that which is in between the extremes, and O indicates round shapes (p. 192).

⁷⁸ p. 193.

⁷⁹ 'exempli gratia significet a privationem (ut apud Graecos), e defectum minorem, i rei diminutionem, u exaggerationem, o intensionem, nimietatem, universalitatem. Si mel significet loquentem, amel erit mutus; emel haesitans seu balbus; imel lallans, loqui incipiens; umel clamans seu vociferans; omel omnia loquens, effutians etc (p. 202).

Comenius' scheme also shows how one might approach the difficulty of reconciling the semantic method to the mimetic one. He has learnt (presumably in part at least from the *Cratylus*) that in an ideal language the elements are of primary importance. Thus in the *Tentamen* he makes his dictionary proceed in stages, first letters, then syllables and thirdly words, declaring that 'Omnium autem lex summa, ut unumquodque per se significativum sit.'⁸⁰ Armed with the mimetic base of word-roots, one can use letters and syllables with them to express different meanings so that 'Ita dum quis literarum et syllabarum significationes primas et simplices intellet, compositas etiam inde voces, totumque sermonis contextum quantus quantus fuerit, eo ipso intelliget, scilicet post exercitationem debitam, qua sibi habitum comparet.'⁸¹

Comenius' optimism that his *Monoglottia* was a practical possibility was, alas, sadly misplaced, but his was by no means the only such case. Another is that of Bishop Wilkins, who in 1668 published *An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* with the imprimatur of the fledgling Royal Society; despite being written by one of the Society's leading members it was soon forgotten.⁸² Whatever one feels about the details of Comenius' scheme and others like it, the emphasis on constructing the ideal language from the elements upwards would meet with Plato's approval. However Plato would probably not approve so readily that one should search for the one true language, *Monoglottia*. The prescriptive theory that Socrates outlines allows for the possibility of different correct languages; in other words it concentrates on the correctness relation. What matters is that one should imitate the essences of things in names in whatever way one sees fit. A problem with Comenius' approach is that if one believes one has acquired *Pansophia* and hence that one can construct *Monoglottia*, the risk of being mistaken and thus misleading everyone else is considerable.⁸³ If however one is concentrating on the correctness relation itself, the temptation to cast the ideal language in tablets of stone and thus make people pay too much attention to names rather than things is lessened.⁸⁴ I shall have more to say on Plato and the quest for an ideal language in 3.4 below.

One final point where Comenius offers some illumination of the *Cratylus* is in the notion that names, at least in such a rationally realised language, are disguised definitions, to be uncovered by etymology; if letters and syllables can

⁸⁰ p. 190.

⁸¹ p. 202.

⁸² Aarsleff, pp. 260-264.

⁸³ Thus when Cratylus claims that Greek names must be correct because they are consistent Socrates points out that, as in geometry, if the initial assumptions are incorrect the whole edifice is faulty, 436b12-e1.

⁸⁴ Comenius' belief in *Monoglottia* can be readily explained by his belief that God imposed a likeness of himself on men, thus allowing the possibility that we too may one day speak the divine language (pp. 189ff); contrast Socrates' words at 400d6-401a5.

be made to fit their bearers 'naturally', '....erit cuiuslibet rei appellatio . . . idem quod rei definitio; hoc est definitionibus nullis erit opus: ipsa ipsa cuiusque rei appellatio determinet quid res sit, genus suum, et differentiam suam secum ferens, ipsis compositurae suae partibus.'⁸⁵ In what follows I shall explore further this view of etymologies as definitions.

3.3 Etymologies as Definitions

I have claimed that there are two etymological methods in play in the *Cratylus* which are, at least on first sight, incompatible with one another. In the main body of etymologies Socrates reads as much as he can into names, picking out more or less plausible semantic elements from a given name, and often producing several conflicting etymologies; he does not systematically go through the letters in a name, combining their separate capacities to reveal the nature of the nominatum. Yet this is what the theory of mimetic πρῶτα seems to demand. In addition, it is hard to see how the freedom in interpretation which the semantic method allows can rest on the foundations offered by the mimetic method. Although once one knows the mimetic capacities of the individual πρῶτα one can, in theory, uncover the essence of a given thing from its name (without, indeed, recourse to any criteria external to that name), the mimetic properties that Socrates suggests in 426-7 are both few in number and do not fit those properties revealed by the semantic method. It appears that two demands on etymology are being made: firstly, that it should enable one to reveal from names the richness of reality, the manifold essences of things, and secondly, that it should be an ἐπιστήμη, a field of knowledge that can be rationally explained right down to its elements. The problem is, can these two objectives be harmoniously reconciled in the *Cratylus*, as in theory they are in Comenius' *Tentamen*?

Some scholars do not see a problem. Allen for example thinks that Socrates chose his earlier etymologies very carefully so as to harmonize with the mimetic values that he suggests for letters;⁸⁶ whilst this may be true of ῥῶ – ῥέον, δέλτα – δοῦν, which are broadly speaking consistent with many of the later etymologies, it is hard to reconcile the majority of them to the meagre stock of mimetic values. If the namegiver had only those to choose from, it is hard to see how the earlier etymologies could ever be founded upon mimetic elements. Socrates reinforces the point in his treatment of κίνησις and στάσις: the former is derived from κίειν ἔσις, 'desire for moving', the latter presumably

⁸⁵ p. 194.

⁸⁶ Art. cit., pp. 51-2.

from *α-ῥσις, the σῖγμα and ταῦ being explained presumably by a desire for euphony. Yet in both cases the etymology arrived at by the semantic method fits ill with an analysis of the mimetic elements. Although ῥῶ is said to be an ὄργανον ... πάσης τῆς κινήσεως, there is no ῥῶ in κίνησις;⁸⁷ and the mimetic values of σῖγμα and ταῦ conflict, the former indicating (very roughly) a form of motion, the latter the quality of binding and restricting. This then indicates the ambiguous nature of στάσις itself, which refers both to ‘rest’ and ‘political strife’.⁸⁸ Plato thus gives the reader a strong hint that there are indeed two, apparently incompatible, methods of etymology.

On the surface however he merely declares that the πρῶτα and ὑπερα ὀνόματα should share the same correctness.⁸⁹ The only apparent concession he makes towards registering that there might be a difficulty is to say that there is a different τρόπος involved in the mimetic method.⁹⁰ He even returns to the first method for the final burst of etymologising at 437a2-c8, again without signalling the change. The methods are united however by their shared aim, that of revealing the natures of the nominanda encoded in names,⁹¹ hence Socrates can claim that there is, or should be, only one principle of correctness at play.⁹² Now the theory that proper names reveal the essences of their nominata constitutes a claim that names are disguised definitions,⁹³ an idea which I shall discuss in this section.⁹⁴ Thereby I hope to show that the move to the mimetic method demonstrates Plato’s grasp of what the construction of a putative ideal language demands.

Robinson divides definition into two broad categories, *real* definition, the defining of things, and *nominal* definition, that of words. He then subdivides the latter into lexical or dictionary definition and stipulative definition. Lexical

⁸⁷ 426c1-2.

⁸⁸ See N. Loraux, ‘Cratyle à l’Epreuve de Stasis’, *Revue de Philosophie Ancienne* 5 (1987), 49-69.

⁸⁹ 422c7-9.

⁹⁰ 422b6-8.

⁹¹ The νομοθέτης is μόνον ἐκείνον τὸν ἀποβλέποντα εἰς τὸ τῇ φύσει ὄνομα ὃν ἐκάστω καὶ δυνάμενον αὐτοῦ τὸ εἶδος τιθέναι εἰς τε τὰ γράμματα καὶ τὰς συλλαβὰς, 390e2-4; the ὀνομαστικός is he who αὐτὸ τοῦτο μιμῆσθαι δύναται ἐκάστου, τὴν οὐσίαν, γράμμασιν τε καὶ συλλαβαῖς, 423e7-8.

⁹² 422d1-3, cf 390d9-e4.

⁹³ For the demand for a definition as a request for the οὐσία or εἶδος of x see Richard Robinson, *Plato’s Earlier Dialectic*, second edition (Oxford, 1953), 49-53. Robinson’s book *Definition* (Oxford, 1950) is my most important source for what follows.

⁹⁴ One might object that no reference to definition is needed; one can explain the move to mimetic πρῶτα, as Annas does (‘Knowledge and Language: the *Theaetetus* and the *Cratylus*’, in *Language and Logos: Studies Presented to G.E.L. Owen*, edited by M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum (Cambridge, 1982), 95-114 (pp. 106-109): Plato here makes the assumption that knowledge must be based on knowledge, so that our knowledge of complex names and λόγοι depends on our knowledge on the ultimate knowables, the πρῶτα. This is true, but the definitional analogy will, I hope, add something to this rather bald account.

definition gives an explanation of the actual usage of a particular word by a person or language group (usually of the usage of a preferred group of language speakers, e.g. speakers of Standard English); a dictionary tends to be a record of manmade contrivances, provisional and subject to continuing evolution as new theories, new discoveries, in short, new ways of looking at the world, come into being. Given however the linguistic authority with which such dictionaries are often invested, it is easy to fall into the trap of regarding the definitions therein as in some way fulfilling a prescriptive ideal, as being fixed and unchangeable.

Stipulative definitions on the other hand look to the future, being a command or request to understand so-and-so as such-and-such. Once a stipulation is accepted and passes into ordinary usage it becomes a lexical definition. The advantage of such definitions is that by dismissing some aspects of a word's meaning they reduce ambiguity and sharpen our concepts, thus being of particular use, for example, in science or normative ethics.

Now etymology in the modern sense comes into the province of historical lexicology, the dictionary definition of the meaning of a word, whereas Plato is interested in real definition, things not concepts. When Socrates asks in the *Euthyphro* what is piety? he is requesting information about the thing piety, what the name *piety* refers to, not the name *piety* itself. In the *Cratylus* however etymology is presented as a means of getting at the essence of the nominatum; what the name truly means is nothing other than that essence, since names are so related to their nominata that examination of the former is tantamount to investigation of the latter. Neither *Cratylus* nor Socrates seem to show any interest in the sort of distinctions between types of definitions drawn by Robinson. The νομοθέτης stipulates what name each thing is to have, names which, *ex hypothesi*, reflect the essences of the nominata; once accepted, these become as it were lexical definitions, ideally retaining the power to reveal the essences of their nominata without losing the strong stipulative force they originally bore. Since the namegiver is assumed to have been skilled (and to have been under the guidance of the dialectician), to examine ὀνόματα in the *Cratylus* is tantamount to examining their nominata; it is nothing less than real definition.

And so the troublesome question 'What is *Justice*?' suddenly loses its sting: etymologise δίκαιον and the answer becomes clear, that which *goes through*. The essence of Justice is to be in flux. What looks like nominal definition, i.e., defining what men in the past have meant by that particular symbol or what men should mean by it, is in fact real definition, namely the definition of an objectively existing thing which is signified by that symbol.

Yet surely this distinction cannot be simply ignored? Indeed Robinson claims that the failure to see the difference between real and nominal definition has resulted in serious errors in the history of philosophy, arguing that of the twelve categories of real definition that he examines only analysis of an object

qualifies as genuine real definition;⁹⁵ I shall make use of his accounts of analysis, and what he calls definition as the search for essence,⁹⁶ attempting to show that Plato was well aware of the demands to be made upon names if they were to be definitions of their *nominata*. Having outlined a model of the essential prerequisites of correct naming he then leaves the task of arriving at the details of a scheme to readers who decide to continue the search for an ideal language. Comenius is one example of someone who did just that.

Definition as the search for essence is a misconceived exercise in Robinson's view: if we say that the essence of X is YZ we are merely making a choice as to what properties of X to regard as special, rather than putting ourselves in contact with a metaphysical reality. Thus to say that being bounded by three sides is the essence of a triangle rather than a mere property is 'merely a confused way of saying that we define the word 'triangle' to mean a figure bounded by three sides.' We could equally well define the word 'triangle' to mean a figure, the sum of whose interior angles adds up to 180 degrees. This is, he remarks, a case of taking an example of nominal definition to be real definition.

Today thanks to philosophers like Kripke and others a more hospitable attitude towards essences exists;⁹⁷ this granted, the search for essence in Robinson's sense fits the semantic method in the *Cratylus*. Socrates picks out one or more of the possible semantic elements from a name, thereby privileging them, and from that material makes up an etymological definition, without justifying satisfactorily why that or those essential definition(s) have been chosen. The procedure is arbitrary in the way that defining the essence of 'triangle' (in Robinson's view) was, since if one accepts the possibility of reading off the essence of names in this way then one has also to admit the possibilities of other etymological interpretations, just as other properties of triangles can be brought forward as candidates for essence. That Plato was not unaware of this is constantly implied by his ironic attitude to the whole etymological enterprise, and his insistence that his etymologies cannot hope to find out more than men's opinions.⁹⁸

Hermogenes eventually asks Socrates to justify the correctness of monosyllables like *ῥέον*, *δοῦν* and *ἰόν* etc.⁹⁹ If the natural theory is going to be given a secure foundation these semantic elements cannot be left lacking a *logos*, floating in an epistemological limbo; in other words, knowledge for Plato in any sphere must be based on knowledge. Thus to acquire knowledge through complex names one must have knowledge through elemental names first. Here

⁹⁵ See *op. cit.*, p. 26 and chapter VI.

⁹⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 153-156, 171-178.

⁹⁷ See S. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, revised edition (Oxford, 1980).

⁹⁸ See, eg. 401a4-5, 425c1-3.

⁹⁹ 421c4-6.

analysis comes in, which involves breaking down a thing into its elements or detailing what makes it what it is, eg when we analyse the circle and come up with a definition of its nature, viz, the curve which is the locus of all the points in a plane equidistant from a given point. This type of analysis is uncertain and often aporetic, as we put forward analyses, test them, alter them and so forth. It is however, in Robinson's opinion, the only genuine form of real definition.

Plainly analysis of some sort is at work in the mimetic method. Here, to etymologise is to take the complex name down to its constituent parts, the *πρῶτα ὀνόματα*, and to consider their mimetic values, assuming that these are indeed the true elements of language, and that they in turn imitate the elements of reality. The semantic method may have looked like a form of hit-and-miss analysis, but the mimetic method represents, I would argue, the genuine article. To justify this claim one needs to look more closely at 422-425.

Here I must also justify several assumptions I have been making, namely that the *πρῶτα* are primarily the individual letters and syllables, not names like *ῥέον* and *δοῦν*, and that in a given name all the letters have mimetic force. Kretzmann for example talks of *πρῶτα* and *ὑστερα ὀνόματα* and then what he calls 'proteronyms'. This is certainly attractive; *τὰ πρῶτα τῶν ὀνομάτων* at 421d2 seems straightforwardly to refer to *ἰόν*, *ῥέον* and *δοῦν*; this being so it is tempting to interpret the other references similarly.¹⁰⁰ The letters and syllables are then the elements of the first names, fitting 393d6-e8, where Socrates draws a distinction between the *στοιχεῖα* and their names: *ἀλλ' ὥσπερ τῶν στοιχείων ὁῖσθα ὅτι ὀνόματα λέγομεν ἀλλ' οὐκ αὐτὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα, πλὴν τεττάρων*. Hence *βῆτα* has three superfluous letters but still shows the nature of the element. One is then left with a choice between saying that in any *πρῶτον ὄνομα* there is only one element with mimetic force, for example *ῥῶ* in *ῥέον*, or whether all the elements of a genuine first name have mimetic force. The fact that Socrates posits mimetic values of *γράμματα* does not mean then that they are the first names, merely the elements or proteronyms that constitute the first names.

This interpretation however can be criticised. At 422a1-b4 Socrates says that the process of analysing names into smaller names must not stop until one has reached the genuine *στοιχεῖον*, that which *οὐκέτι ἔκ τινων ἑτέρων σύγκειται ὀνομάτων*. There is no justification for Kretzmann to claim that the letters themselves, the so-called proteronyms, cannot be names.¹⁰¹ The elements are the end of the process of analysis of a name into smaller names;

¹⁰⁰ Cf, eg, 424a7-b2; 425a1; 434a4-5.

¹⁰¹ N. Kretzmann, 'Plato on the Correctness of Names', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (1971), 126-138, seems to base his claim that the proteronyms are not names on a misinterpretation of 422b (p. 135). Contrast Annas who talks of element names, art. cit., p. 107.

as such they are names themselves,¹⁰² revealing an essence as any name should.¹⁰³ Whether a *πρῶτον* is a letter or a syllable depends on the nature of its nominatum. This may seem a minor point, given that all are agreed that analysis down to elements is at issue, whatever one chooses to call those elements. Yet by failing to call the letters names Kretzmann misleads by implying that the elements are in some sense of a lower status than the *πρῶτα* and *ὑστερα ὀνόματα* in virtue of not being names, and that they do not necessarily bear a sense. This then implies that there is to be the kind of redundancy in the language as a whole that we saw in *βῆτα*. That this is not so is strongly suggested by 424b7-425b3.

Here Socrates is discussing matching mimetic elements to reality. The first step is to divide up the elements of language according to their powers, into mutes, consonants and so on; the second is less certain, but it seems that one follows the same procedure with regard to things, dividing them up and seeing if *ἐν αὐτοῖς ἔνεστιν εἶδη κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ὥσπερ ἐν τοῖς στοιχείοις*.¹⁰⁴ Thirdly, having done all this, one must apply names according to likeness, whether this means applying one letter to one thing or mixing together letters to form a syllable to depict something, like painters who sometimes use unadulterated paints, and at other times mix up paints to form new colours so as to depict something. Thus are *ὀνόματα*, *ῥήματα* and *λόγοι* created.

This passage should be seen as putting the abstract argument of the tool analogy passage into a more concrete form, thereby developing the prescriptive theory, though with a greater stress on what was before of little interest, the actual material of the language. Having fixed upon the mimetic method for revealing the specific form of Name appropriate to each thing, Socrates outlines what needs to be done before a namegiver can hope to produce a philosophically sound language. He then puts the hypothesis that Greek is a natural language to a further test, by suggesting mimetic values for the letters. The absurdity of the results should not blind us to the fact that this is the proper, technical way a namegiver should proceed, whether Greek has been so ordered or not.¹⁰⁵ Would-be namegivers then face a formidable difficulty in correctly analysing language and reality into their respective elements, for there is no

¹⁰² Thus note that the element is that which is no longer formed from *other* (*ἐτέρων*) names, 422b1.

¹⁰³ 422d1-3.

¹⁰⁴ The text is uncertain at 424d1, and various suggestions have been made; see M.A. Stewart, 'Plato, *Cratylus* 424c9 sqq.', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 57 (1975), 167-171, who points to the grave difficulties with Burnet's text. The best suggestion to my mind is that of Friedländer, who reads *καὶ ἐπειδὴ τὰ αὐτὰ διελόμεθα, τὰ ὄντα αὐ πάντα* (sc. *δεῖ διελεῖσθαι*) *ὅς δὲ ὀνόματα ἐπιθεῖναι*. The problem with this reading is the series of scribal errors that have to be assumed; the important point to bear in mind is that we are to apply the same kind of analysis to things as we apply to names, to see how far they match up.

¹⁰⁵ 425a6-b3.

guarantee that those elements will turn out to be consistently isomorphous. The painting analogy makes this point plain: the painter does not merely have a stock of basic colours which he uses regardless, rather he has to create new ones by mixing together two or more paints so as to imitate his subjects properly. Likewise the namegiver has to mix up various linguistic colours to imitate *nominata* correctly, the point being that names should imitate things, not the other way around. Thus the *πρῶτα* are not necessarily only the individual *γράμματα*; they could be monosyllabic words. The *πρῶτα ὀνόματα* represent the limits of analysis, the smallest parts of language with semantic content;¹⁰⁶ as such whether they are letters, syllables or whatever depends not on the nature of language but on that of a given *nominatum*.

This passage fits the description of analysis which Robinson gives well: it is a tentative process, guided always both by the nature of language itself, the mimetic material, and by the nature of the *definiendum*, with the latter taking precedence. Once the ideal language has been created however, theoretically one can have access by etymology to the nature of things, revealed by the mimetic *πρῶτα ὀνόματα*. Thus what looks like nominal definition is truly real definition. In addition, just as the combinations of colours in a picture creates a complex representation of something, so too the namegiver's combination of letters to make syllables enriches the stock of mimetic values and enables him to create a complex mimetic representation of a given *nominatum*. Instead of a mere twenty or so mimetic values one could have a much richer linguistic palette. With the parallel of Comenius to hand, one can speculate on ways in which the semantic method could be based on a mimetic foundation;¹⁰⁷ what Plato's attitude was to this ideal I shall discuss in the next section.¹⁰⁸ Given this picture of analysis, it seems reasonable to assume that Plato must mean all the elements in a correct name to have some mimetic force; note that at 427c6-9 he says that the namegiver makes names for everything *κατὰ γράμματα καὶ κατὰ συλλαβὰς*.¹⁰⁹ If one objects that *βῆτα* and the like do not fit this pattern yet they earlier did seem to satisfy Socrates' prescription, the short reply is that the argument has progressed: through the course of the dialogue we have gained a deeper insight into what the goal of an ideal language requires. Whereas before Socrates was satisfied with such

¹⁰⁶ Cf 385b2-d1—even the smallest part of a *λόγος* is true or false.

¹⁰⁷ I shall make some brief remarks on the possibilities latent in the mimetic theory in 6.3 below.

¹⁰⁸ Anagnostopoulos remarks that 'this is indeed a vision of a perfect language', in 'Plato's *Cratylus*: the Two Theories of the Correctness of Names', *Review of Metaphysics* 25 (1971/2), 691-736 (pp. 728-730); cf his 'The Significance of Plato's *Cratylus*', *Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1973/4), 318-345 (p. 327). Cf R.H. Weingartner, *The Unity of the Platonic Dialogue: the Cratylus, the Protagoras, the Parmenides* (Indianapolis/New York, 1973), pp. 35-36.

¹⁰⁹ Cf Comenius on his *πρῶτα ὀνόματα*: no redundancy of language is allowed, rather every letter and syllable signifies its predetermined meaning, op. cit., p. 173.

names, now they would fall short of the ideal (even if they are still reasonably good names).

The tool analogy argument is, as I have said before, a sketch rather than a fully detailed, worked-out theory. The following discussion of Greek is a kind of description of the language according to the natural hypothesis, which forms an extended parody of the mistaken attitudes towards language of many Greek thinkers and poets.¹¹⁰ Eventually Socrates, prompted by Hermogenes, considers the elements of the language. Knowledge must be based on knowledge, as Annas says;¹¹¹ but the move to the mimetic method also means a move away from parody of other etymologists to a deeper appreciation of the demands of an ideal language. If nominal definition could ever be identical to real definition, this is how the namegiver should proceed. Plato knew that one needed a careful analysis of language and reality before the construction of an ideal language could be achieved, but most Greeks behaved as if names could be etymologised *ad libitum* and the essences of the *nominata* recovered.

Yet why should the idea of names being disguised definitions, recoverable via etymology, attract Plato's interest? The likeliest answer is that this theory subverts the very notion of dialectic, offering us the prize of a quick and puzzle-free route to knowledge. The profound difficulties encountered in the early Socratic dialogues in finding any answers to the 'What is X?' questions would thus be solved at a blow. Though this may seem fantastic, the use of etymologies to support their ideas by other Greek thinkers implies a belief that the truth about (at least some) things is encoded in the names that we call them, that we can (to use a later example) discover the nature of gold from *gold* rather than gold.

A further question: why does Socrates not point to the problem of the two different methods and their apparent incompatibility? The short answer is simple: if we want to take up the search for an ideal language, along the lines perhaps of Comenius' *Tentamen*, the problem is for us to solve, not him. A further point to make is that Socrates does admit that a different *τρόπος* of revealing essences is involved in the mimetic method. We move from the comfortable Socratic image of the craftsman to the more ambiguous and potentially disturbing one of the artist. Can mimetic names be less deceptive than other forms of mimesis that Plato abhors? Can a painter be a true craftsman? The painting analogy is a hint to the reader that a real change in method has taken place, and that there is a deep problem here.

Plato had good reasons for wanting to put the study of names firmly in its place, to show that real definition and recollection are the province of dialectic, not ingenious philology. Whatever truth names do hold must be tested; one

¹¹⁰ See chapters 4 and 5 below.

¹¹¹ See note 94 above.

cannot simply trust them.¹¹² Yet did he have the faith of a Comenius that in the future an ideal language could be constructed, according to the model he has outlined? This is the question I turn to now.

3.4 *The Dream of an Ideal Language: the Politicus, Phaedrus and the Cratylus*

I have stressed in these three chapters that Plato was outlining a sketch for an ideal language, and that describing the present state of Greek was secondary to this purpose. So far I have left some interesting questions begging, such as whether this putative ideal language is an achievable goal, and to what extent one is justified in changing names. In this final section I will suggest that a comparison with the *Politicus*' discussion of legislative reform offers a useful way of approaching such questions.

When is one justified in casting aside tradition and adopting new νόμοι, be they laws or names? If one looks back to the theory outlined by Socrates in the tool analogy passage, one would say that only that *rara avis* the διαλεκτικός has the vision and skill to direct linguistic innovation; thus onomastic reform is not to be entered upon lightly. Similarly, when considering reform of legislation one needs a man of insight, possessing scientific knowledge;¹¹³ the problem in the *Politicus* is to specify precisely the nature of the knowledge involved.¹¹⁴

To summarise the Foreigner's argument: this scientific knowledge will be possessed by very few, and these few are to be considered true rulers, whether they rule with or against our consent, with laws or without, and whether they themselves be rich or poor, just as doctors remain doctors so long as they practice their art for the good of their patients. The mark of the true constitution then is this, whether the rulers have this science or not; the other considerations, like the rule of law, are mere side-issues. This means that executions, banishments, the sending out of colonies and the bringing in of people from elsewhere are all licit, ἕως περ ἂν ἐπιστήμη καὶ τῷ δίκαιῳ προσχρώμενοι σώζοντες ἐκ χείρονος βελτίω [sc. τὴν πόλιν] ποιῶσι κατὰ δύναμιν...¹¹⁵

¹¹² T. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory: the Early and Middle Dialogues* (Oxford, 1977), argues that names, whilst embodying false beliefs about the virtues, still preserve the outline of their real nature; the Socratic ἔλεγχος is a means of testing those beliefs (p. 66).

¹¹³ Thus in the *Politicus* ἡ βασιλικὴ ἰσχύς τις τῶν ἐπιστημῶν, 292b6-7; in the *Cratylus* the διαλεκτικός is the man who has knowledge of the science of dialectic, enabling him to test whether names are good names or not (390c2-12), whilst the namegiver possesses the knowledge of how to put the appropriate form of name into letters and syllables (389d4-8, 390e1-4).

¹¹⁴ 292b12-c3.

¹¹⁵ 293a2-e5.

Young Socrates is taken aback somewhat at the idea that the existing laws can be broken with perfect justice. The Foreigner grants that legislation is part of kingship, but claims that the ideal is that not the laws, but the wise and kingly man should rule, and goes on to explain why.¹¹⁶ Essentially law is general; as such, it cannot cope with the incessant changeable nature of humans and human affairs, and the great dissimilarities between individuals. Law is like a stubborn person who will brook no changes to the arrangements he has laid down, despite changed circumstances. Why the necessity for legislation then? Because it is impossible to spend time with everyone and everything, prescribing what is to be done; one has to make general prescriptions.¹¹⁷ This does not mean that they should be written on tablets of stone: if a proper legislator sees the need to change his own prescriptions or improve the work of another, it would be ridiculous to prohibit him from doing so.¹¹⁸ Thus just as a true sea-captain always acts for the benefit of his crew and ship, not by writing out laws for himself to follow, but by using his skills, so too true government is provided by those who demonstrate a knowledge of the art of kingship, a power more effective than the laws, the proviso again being that they use their art and justice for the benefit of the citizens.¹¹⁹

This is the ideal; in practice, reliance on the traditions and established laws of the state is what prevails in human communities. This is an acceptable second-best.¹²⁰ Then the Foreigner explains the rise of this second-best by means of the analogy with medicine and seamanship, sketching a society where both of these arts are reduced to written instructions covering at least most eventualities; any man in theory can then learn these 'arts', and any one who does practice either art is liable to be arraigned if he is suspected of having transgressed these instructions.¹²¹ If someone does attempt to research beyond the bounds of the statutes he is called *μετεωρολόγον, ἀδολέσχην τινὰ σοφιστήν*; he is to be accused of corrupting younger members of society. No-one is wiser than the law, it is argued, and anyone can read the laws concerning these arts. Such a practice would destroy any art to which it was applied; on the other hand, complete innovation is even worse. Existing laws are based on a considerable amount of experience, that is not lightly to be overturned. In changing existing laws in order to improve the running of the state, legislators are trying to imitate the work of the true legislator; if they try to do this without any knowledge of the science of kingship their work will be but a pale reflection

¹¹⁶ 294a6ff.

¹¹⁷ 294e8-b5.

¹¹⁸ 295e4-296a2.

¹¹⁹ 296e4-297b3.

¹²⁰ 297b5-e6.

¹²¹ 297e8ff.

of the true legislator, a poor copy; if they do it skilfully the result will not be a copy but αὐτὸ τὸ ἀληθέςτατον ἐκεῖνο.¹²²

This ideal is so hard to achieve that mankind has despaired of achieving it, relying instead on the rule of law; no wonder then that existing cities all suffer so many ills, resting on a legislative foundation unformed by skill and knowledge, a procedure that in any other art would ruin its products.¹²³ The Foreigner then runs through differing kinds of constitutions.

The general argument of this passage recalls the tool analogy: in both, the superiority and autonomy of the wise and skilful man who is entrusted with reforms is stressed, as is the fact that there are few such men. The similarities in the structure and content of the arguments thus suggest that the *Politicus* emphasising as it does the difficult middle route to be steered between both arbitrary innovation and stubborn clinging to tradition at all costs, is relevant to questions raised in the *Cratylus*, such as whether the ideal language is an achievable goal, and the extent to which innovation in names in general is practical and desirable.

Firstly, the ideal legislator is just that—an ideal. The Foreigner explicitly says that despair at finding that ideal man has led human communities to take refuge in various constitutions,¹²⁴ and so too the namegiver/dialectician of the *Cratylus* is an ideal construction. This does not mean that the ideal ruler (or the διαλεκτικός) will never by necessity appear amongst men, merely that he is a very difficult to find.

This accounts for the attitude towards innovation, which at first sight seems somewhat craven, given the obviously bitter parody of Athenian practice in 298a1-299e4.¹²⁵ On the one hand we have the denunciation of the reception that someone like Socrates receives, on the other a recognition of the difficulties involved in radical reforms. Existing laws contain a certain wisdom culled over generations.¹²⁶ Rules to avoid anarchy, given our present imperfect state, are of paramount importance, though the way forward is held up to our view.

¹²² 300d9-e2.

¹²³ 301b5-302a2.

¹²⁴ 301c6-d6.

¹²⁵ Notice especially the reference to Socrates' condemnation, with a precise verbal echo at 299b8 (cf c5).

¹²⁶ Compare the following comments of J. Cook Wilson: 'The authority of language is too often forgotten in philosophy, with serious results. Distinctions made or applied in ordinary language are more likely to be right than wrong. Developed, as they have been, in what may be called the natural course of thinking, under the influence of experience and in the apprehension of particular truths, whether of everyday life or of science, they are not due to any preconceived theory . . . On the other hand, the actual fact is that a philosophical distinction is *prima facie* more likely to be wrong than what is called a popular distinction, because it is based on a philosophic theory that may be wrong in its ultimate principles.' See *Statement and Inference, with other Philosophical Papers* by J. Cook Wilson, edited by A.S.L. Farquharson, 2 volumes (Oxford, 1926), ii, pp. 874-875, and cf 2.5 above.

If one looks at the *Cratylus* in this light then the ideal language becomes an ideal to be realized in the future, not a present possibility; the most pressing problem is to make men see the proper status of names and naming, and reform the language gradually, using dialectic. An example from the *Politicus* is the Foreigner's rejection of the common chauvinist division of mankind into Greeks and barbarians; this corresponds to no actual division in reality and so should be rejected.¹²⁷ Likewise in the *Cratylus* on several occasions it is asserted that Greek and barbarian languages can be on a par with one another in terms of correctness.¹²⁸ Names above all should be agreed means of referring to things, subject to change if demonstrably incorrect, but serving in the meantime as basic tools for dialectic, referring to agreed referents.¹²⁹

In both the *Cratylus* and the *Politicus* we find Plato recommending us to follow the narrow path that lies between conservatism and anarchic innovation with regard to language. This means a cautious approach to reform whilst realizing that existing institutions, statutes and language are only at best an approximation to the truth. One difference in emphasis may be an increased readiness on Plato's part by the time he wrote the *Politicus* to accept the 'second best' of ordinary language; nevertheless in both cases our attention is pointed forward towards an goal which is theoretically achievable. Which brings me on to another of the most interesting parallels between the two dialogues. At 300d4-e2 the Foreigner says that whenever someone does something against the written laws on the grounds that it is better to do it that way he is imitating the actions of the wise ruler; if this is done unskilfully then it is a bad imitation, but if it is done in a knowledgeable fashion then it is the 'real thing'. This recalls the 'Two Cratyluses' argument at 432a8-c6, where the point is to demonstrate that names are at best mere copies: a name that perfectly imitated its nominatum would no longer be a name but another token of that thing. Here there is a possibility of going beyond the confines of written legislation: ideally one demonstrates one's skill in action, as the sea-captain responds to problems on a voyage, not by consulting a rule-book, but by using his knowledge and experience. The message however is in a sense the same, showing the drawbacks of relying on imitations: names at best are imitations of things, laws imitations (or better perhaps descriptions) of the actions of the wise ruler; in both cases they are fixed and cannot answer back if questioned.

Compare now a very famous passage from the *Phaedrus* the story of the inventor of writing, Theuth, presenting his invention to the god Ammon.¹³⁰ The

¹²⁷ 262c10-263a1.

¹²⁸ See 383a7-b2; 389d8-390a2.

¹²⁹ An example would be the pseudo-element phlogiston; scientists knew what they meant by the term, namely the inflammable principle; when experiments showed that no such element existed, the term became of historical interest only.

¹³⁰ 274c5ff.

proud inventor claimed that he had discovered μνήμης τε γὰρ καὶ σοφίας φάρμακον, but Ammon declared the new invention would cause men to neglect memory, giving them the false opinion that they were wise. Socrates explains: Δεινὸν γάρ που, ὦ Φαῖδρε, τοῦτ' ἔχει γραφή, καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς ὅμοιον ζωγραφίᾳ. καὶ γὰρ τὰ ἐκείνης ἔκγονα ἔστηκε μὲν ὡς ζῶντα, ἐὰν δ' ἀνέρη τι, σεμνῶς πάνυ σιγᾷ. ταῦτόν δέ καὶ οἱ λόγοι· δόξαις μὲν ἂν ὡς τι φρονούντας αὐτοὺς λέγειν, ἐὰν δέ τι ἔρη τῶν λεγομένων βουλόμενος μαθεῖν, ἔν τι σημαίνει μόνον ταῦτόν αἰεῖ.¹³¹ The genuine form of writing is different, being the λόγος, ὃς μετ' ἐπιστήμης γράφεται ἐν τῇ τοῦ μανθάνοντος ψυχῇ, δυνατὸς μὲν ἀμῦναι ἐαυτῷ, ἐπιστήμων δὲ λέγειν τε καὶ σιγᾷν πρὸς οὓς δεῖ.¹³²

The truly knowledgeable man has his knowledge written on his soul. Reading the *Cratylus* in this light the irreducibly mimetic and thus inferior nature of even genuinely mimetic names is once again stressed. Given that language is a tool of communication, and that short of positing mysterious telepathic powers direct 'soul to soul' speech is absurd,¹³³ the ideal language, at least as far as men are concerned, does seem to be illusory. One cannot have an ideal language save where souls, released from their bodily incarceration, can freely interact, namely in Hades. Human names, being mere poor imitations of things, cannot but be inadequate.¹³⁴

What then of the ideal language? The answer is that the ideal is to have the soul of a wise man. Only such a man could produce the best possible human language and use it properly; but also he is the last person who actually needs it. Nevertheless, one must not lose hold of one of the important lessons of the dialogue, that there are degrees of names, some better than others.¹³⁵ It is worth striving towards the putative ideal language, even if we never reach it, so long as we keep language firmly in its place, as a tool and not our master. We must learn to appreciate the gap between the linguistic representation and the thing itself, and not take the imitation of the truth for the reality, realising the partial nature of any fixed representation.

The suggestion that the ideal language as such is not possible for men, but only an approximation to it may sound a blow to the tool analogy argument, but no more so than the claim that the ideal ruler does not need laws can be said to wreck the search for the right constitution. In both cases Plato puts forward the

¹³¹ 275d4-9.

¹³² 276a5-7.

¹³³ Cf *Symposium* 175c6-e6, where Agathon wants Socrates to sit next to him so that he can draw on Socrates' new-found wisdom; Socrates replies that Agathon is behaving as if knowledge could be 'siphoned' from one person to another—a kind of intellectual osmosis one might say.

¹³⁴ Cf the etymology of Hades, who is said to bind souls to him through the greatest bond of all, the desire to become a better person, at 403a5-404b4.

¹³⁵ See, eg, 432b1-433a2.

possibility of pursuing a difficult middle way between stubborn conservatism and reckless innovation, based on a careful distinction between reality and its various 'copies' and the need to be constantly on guard against the power of language to deceive. In both our attention is pointed in the right direction. Names, like all other 'copies', are to be treated as such; failure to see this can only lead to the mistakes of so many Greek thinkers, regarding names as bearing the key to the nature of their bearers. Even the best possible language is a 'copy'.¹³⁶

This should not be a surprising verdict in the light of the interpretation of the prescriptive theory that I have outlined in the last two chapters. Socrates always separates name and thing, copy and original, and stresses that the former is derivative of the latter, warning the reader thereby of the dangers that lie in 'fixing' the mimetic values or meanings of names. For by doing that one risks taking the name as more secure a reference point than the named. In the following two chapters I shall be arguing that Plato was aiming his parody against people who did just that. The best possible human language would be a mighty aid to dialectic so long as one remembers that it remains a mere copy of things and cannot replace the study of them. In other words one must heed the words of congratulation of the Foreigner to Young Socrates: καὶν διαφυλάξης τὸ μὴ σπουδάζειν ἐπὶ τοῖς ὀνόμασιν, πλουσιώτερος εἰς τὸ γῆρας ἀναφανήσῃ φρονήσεως.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Thus Anagnostopoulos and Weingartner (see note 108) are right to point to a vision of an ideal language in the *Cratylus*, but somewhat sanguine about Plato's attitude to it.

¹³⁷ *Pol.* 261e5-7.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ETYMOLOGIES OF THE *CRATYLUS*

It is time to turn from consideration of Socrates' prescriptive theory to the 'descriptive' part of the dialogue, where the hypothesis that the Greek language is in fact a natural language is examined. This etymological section raises various difficult questions for the modern reader. Since the etymologies appear ridiculous, one is bound to ask why Plato wrote them at all; and given the proportion of the dialogue devoted to their exposition, one is further puzzled as to why Plato thought it worth preserving over a hundred of them. If one claims, plausibly enough, that his intention was to parody earlier or contemporary thinkers, one must then try to suggest whom he had in mind. Various attempts have been made in the past to answer such pressing questions, some of which will be discussed below, but no one solution has carried the field. The lack of parallels to the etymological section in Plato's work, the paucity of evidence for etymologizing generally in the pre-classical and classical periods,¹ and the usual difficulties in interpreting degrees of irony make this unsurprising.² The result has been a turning away from the etymologies in favour of studying the opening and closing parts of the dialogue, where one seems to be on more familiar ground, and one can argue about what theory of language Plato held and similar questions more congenial to modern readers. Valuable work has been done on particular passages in the etymological section, but little of late on the etymologies as a whole.

One tends to think of Plato as a consummate literary artist as well as a great philosopher, so the idea that almost half the dialogue can be safely ignored should strike one as methodologically unsound.³ Hence the need for another

¹ If Dionysius of Halicarnassus is to be believed, Plato was the first writer to discuss the subject of etymology at length, *de compositione verborum* 16; the expression used is εἰσάγειν λόγον.

² Thus De Vries gave up the idea of a commentary on the work 'because for the etymologizing part there are no parallels in Plato's work, and the doctrines which are attacked can hardly be identified.' See 'Notes on Some Passages of the *Cratylus*', in *Mnemosyne* iv, 8 (1955), 290-297 (p. 290, note 1).

³ The main etymological section extends roughly from page 397 to 421, with the mimetic πρῶτα ὀνόματα theory taking up another 7 pages. Thus the etymologies take up at least 24 out of the 57 Stephanus pages of the dialogue. Interestingly, in one ancient epitome of the dialogue, [Alcinous] *Didaskalicus* vi (see P. Louis, *Albinos: Epitomé* (Paris, 1945), pp. 37-41), the etymologies as such are not mentioned, so neglect of the etymologies began early.

look. The travails of generations of scholars suggest that we are in more than usually difficult territory here; my conclusions (which owe much to the work of Goldschmidt especially⁴) can only hope at best to be plausible answers to the above problems whilst demonstrating a continuity of interpretation between this large section of the dialogue and the other, more well-travelled parts.

I have stressed in the chapters above that Socrates studiously avoids committing himself to laying down what the ideal language is, rather he gives a prescription as to the form it should take; throughout he is careful to emphasise the priority of the *nominatum* over the name. This should be kept in mind during the etymologies. I shall try to show how Plato is attacking those who to some degree or other invert this relationship, so that names become more epistemologically important, because apparently more stable, than flux-ridden things. Plato, I shall claim, sees a culture-wide fallacy afoot, that of interpreting language, and above all the language of 'authorities' like Homer, as if it were transparently 'natural', offering easy access to the essences of things. Only a thorough investigation of names, as opposed to the occasional forays into etymology that characterise Greek poets and thinkers, could offer any basis to the strategy of appealing to etymology to answer questions of substance, or indeed refute it to the satisfaction of its practitioners. This investigation is what Plato offers us; it is lengthy, but necessarily so.

It follows that I shall reject those who have seen only one, or at the most several targets for Plato's attention. The field is far wider than that. I also assume that the etymologies have a parodic function, an assertion that is not uncontroversial.⁵ In making this assumption I do not wish to deny that some of the etymologies are perfectly good attempts by modern etymological standards,⁶ or to claim that the etymologies are just a joke (nothing in Plato is just a joke),⁷ or indeed to suggest that the relationship between Plato and the sources for his etymologies is in any way straightforward; Plato was not a doxographer, but adapted (and misrepresented?) the work of his predecessors and contemporaries to his own ends. In what follows I shall try to make

⁴ 'V. Goldschmidt, *Essai sur le Cratyle: contribution à l'histoire de la pensée de Platon*, Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes, Sciences hist. et philol. fascicule 279 (Paris, 1940). (Hereafter Goldschmidt.)

⁵ See chapter 29 of G. Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Socrates*, 2nd edition (London 1867), 3 volumes, ii, pp. 501-551, for a robust defence of the etymologies. Grote seems to miss all the irony of Socrates' etymological display; in criticism see D.D. Heath, 'On Plato's *Cratylus*', in *Journal of Philology* 17 (1888) pp. 192-218.

⁶ For a list of 'sound' etymologies see *Cratyle*, Platon, *Oeuvres Complètes* Tome V, 2, edited and translated by L. Méridier (Paris, 1931), p. 20.

⁷ Something close to this view can be found in J.C.B. Gosling, *Plato* (London, 1973), who sees the etymological section as 'hard to take seriously', its function being 'partly to rest the mind, partly to bring home the unplausibility of a thesis which, if described but undeveloped, might seem to have some attraction.' (p. 206). The latter point is closer to my interpretation, but I shall attempt to show why the etymologies are developed in quite the way that they are.

plausible the claim that Plato is consciously reworking, even ‘improving’ the etymological efforts of other Greek thinkers; the uncertainty and paucity of evidence however means that plausibility is the most one can hope for. In what immediately follows I shall outline my interpretation, using some of the work that has been done on the etymologies to demonstrate of Plato’s parodic technique; Chapter 5 will take the form of a fuller survey of the possible targets of Plato’s critique.

4.1 *The Scope and Order of the Etymologies*

Firstly, a brief overview of the etymologies. Having outlined his prescriptive theory of naming, Socrates denies that he knows the precise nature of the correctness of names;⁸ he is willing however to investigate the matter in the company of Hermogenes. The Sophists are too expensive to consult on this question so they turn to Homer (a point of some importance, as I shall try to show below), and discuss his views on naming, using Ἑκτωρ and Ἀστυάναξ as examples. These are followed shortly afterwards by a succession of etymologies that trace a family line from Orestes to Zeus, Kronos and Ouranos, before Socrates counsels leaving proper names be in favour of investigating the names of τὰ ἀεὶ ὄντα καὶ πεφυκότα.⁹ There follow etymologies of θεοί, δαίμονες, ἥρωες, ἄνθρωποι, ψυχὴ and σῶμα before Socrates moves on (with reluctance) to deal with the gods.¹⁰ This section of the etymologies includes all the major Olympians plus more minor gods like Pan, who is in context however very important.¹¹ Then we move on to what one might call ‘physics’: stars, elements, and periods of time.¹²

The flow of etymologies increases now as things enter the human domain with names of intellectual, ethical and practical virtues and vices, plus some, like ἀνὴρ, γυνή, θῆλυ, τέχνη and μηχανή, which cannot easily be fitted into the general pattern;¹³ and then names for emotions, desires, intellectual states of mind are dealt with, though again ἐκούσιον and ἀνάγκη seem not to fit the pattern.¹⁴ Finally Socrates deals with τὰ μέγιστα καὶ τὰ κάλλιστα, ὄνομα, ἀλήθεια, ψεῦδος, ὄν and οὐκ ὄν.¹⁵

⁸ 391a4-b2.

⁹ 397b1-8.

¹⁰ 397c4-400c9.

¹¹ 400d1-408d5.

¹² 408d6-410e1.

¹³ 411a1-419b4.

¹⁴ 419b5-420e4.

¹⁵ 421a1-c2. This is the end of the etymological section proper; I shall not deal at present with either the πρῶτα ὀνόματα or the sample non-fluxy etymologies at 437a2-c8.

These etymologies can be roughly divided into three sections, one dealing with divine names, another with the names of the objects of 'physics', and a third with the names of human vices and virtues. Here Plato has given the reader some careful stage directions as to the divisions to make, a point which brings me on to the contribution of Hermogenes.¹⁶ Whilst Socrates puts an end to the etymologies of proper names and those of the gods at 397b1-7 and 408d4-5 respectively, it is Hermogenes who more or less sets the agenda for the discussion, suggesting the classes of name to be discussed next at 400d1-5, 408d6-e1, 411a1-4, 419b5-6, 421a1-4 and most importantly 421c3-6,¹⁷ and on numerous other occasions feeding Socrates with names to etymologize.¹⁸ Thus the direction of the survey that Socrates makes of Greek names is for much of the time dictated by Hermogenes, who is far from being a merely passive partner in the discussion. This is an important feature of the etymologies that commentators fail to take into account, and one to which I shall return below.

Having sketched the progress of the etymologies, what is one to make of it? Some scholars have been tempted to make much.¹⁹ That there is a general pattern in the etymologies seems undeniable: Gaiser suggests that the initial series *god, demon, hero, man, soul and body*, function as general concepts under which all the other etymologies can be subsumed, with the closing series, *name, truth, the false, being and not-being*, marking the fundamental categories lying at the root of the whole etymological investigation; he also notes that the etymologies of what he calls the second main section (counting the 'physics' section as explaining names of the 'unpersönlichen göttlichen Wesenheiten' and thus continuing the divine names) mark a move from 'Geistig-Seelischen zum Körpergebundenen'.²⁰

Brumbaugh goes further, describing the tracing of Orestes' ancestry back to Ouranos as a 'familiar dialectical route from becoming to being', reversed in the series running from *god to body*; given this framework men's meanings

¹⁶ See also 1.3 above.

¹⁷ This leads into the *πρῶτα ὀνόματα* discussion. Note however that earlier at 416a1-2 Hermogenes asks Socrates to etymologize *κακόν*, which he has been using to explain various names. This request is in essence just the same as that made at 421c3-6, a request to justify the elements of the complex names, but in this passage Socrates evades the difficulty by claiming the name is of foreign origin and therefore inexplicable. Thus the *πρῶτα ὀνόματα* theory could have been introduced there and then, but strategically it comes better after the etymologies have culminated in *τὰ μέγιστα καὶ τὰ κάλλιστα*.

¹⁸ See 402c4-5, 404b5-7, 406b7, 406d3-4, 407c3, 407 e1-4, 409a6, 409c3-4, 409c10, 410c4, 416a1-2, 416a7-9, 417b6, 417d1, 418a4 and 420b6.

¹⁹ An example is A. Steiner, who argued in 'Die Etymologien in Platons *Kratylos*', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* N.S. 22 (1916), 109-132, that the style of the three main sections of the etymologies is so different that they must have been directed at three different people.

²⁰ K. Gaiser, 'Name und Sache in Platons < *Kratylos* >', *Abhandlungen der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften* (philosophisch-historische Klasse), 1974, 3. Abhandlung, pp. 58-59.

are examined in a triple series: 'names of wholes, causes, and systems are analyzed down to names of elements, taking the elements of physics, of psychology, and of language in succession.' The point of all this is to show by an exhaustive sampling of a cosmological vocabulary that etymology cannot solve the problem of rest versus motion. Behind the apparent confusion there is order.²¹

This reading's detail is supported by a debatable correspondence with the *Timaeus*.²² The reason why the details of Brumbaugh's account beg the question of the relation between the *Cratylus* and the *Timaeus* is because a rigid Platonic schema is being sought, a sort of failed attempt at arriving at the proper cosmological doctrines that the *Timaeus* is to set forth. This seems to me to be quite the wrong approach: Hermogenes, as I have pointed out, largely determines the order of the etymologies, and there is no sign that he is to be seen as someone in touch with the Platonic way of looking at things.

In addition, there are signs in the text that we are not to try to read too rigid a pattern into it. At 415b6-c2 Socrates remarks that he should have discussed δειλία earlier, after etymologizing ἀνδρεία, adding that 'we seem to me to have passed over many others as well.' Goldschmidt also points out that Socrates compares his progress to a chariot race, hardly the paradigm of orderly motion;²³ and the leitmotiv of Euthyphronic inspiration is not such as to inspire confidence in the results of the etymologies.²⁴ Note too the names that do not quite fit into the pattern of their section, like *male* and *female*: the connection that suggests itself between courage and masculinity leads in turn to consideration of the nature of the female, drawing Socrates away briefly from his discussion of names of the virtues. The conclusion to draw from this is that the disorderliness of the etymologies is to be taken at face value as far as the exact detail of the ordering goes; Socrates is enmeshed in the world of δόξα, as he is quick to stress,²⁵ and so things are disorganized.

Rather than read into the etymologies too much Platonic systematizing, one needs to find an interpretation that does justice to at least these features of the etymologies: the division of the etymologies into distinctive sections, whose

²¹ 'Plato's *Cratylus*: the Order of the Etymologies' in *Review of Metaphysics* 11 (1957-8), 502-510.

²² See, eg, p. 508, n.8: 'The substitution of the gods for the structural details of the *Timaeus* cosmology is based on the notion that the gods are personifications of basic structural cosmological properties and concepts.'

²³ Thus at 407d8-9 he challenges Hermogenes to test the mettle of Euthyphro's horses; at 414b2-3 he is carried ἐκτὸς δρόμου when he gets on to the flat; and at 420d3 he declares that he is on the last lap. There is a textual problem in the last passage; Burnet adopts Adam's emendation and prints Τέλος γὰρ ἤδη θέω, whilst Méridier prints θεῶ, translating 'c'est que l'inspiration de la divinité touche à sa fin'. It seems doubtful that θεῶ can bear this sense, and the easy change to θέω is supported by the continuing racing metaphor, as Goldschmidt argues, op. cit., p. 108, note 2.

²⁴ 396d4-397a1; 399a1; 407d7-9; 409d1-2 and 428c7-8.

²⁵ See 393b1-4; 401a4-5; 428a6-8, d1-2; cf 426b5-6.

direction is from the divine to the merely human; the degree of 'untidiness' in Socrates' speculations that cannot easily be explained away; and the fact that it is Hermogenes, not Socrates, who determines much of the course of the discussion.

To answer this, one needs firstly to recall a point of Brumbaugh's, namely that Socrates investigates a wide range of names, a cosmological vocabulary in the widest possible sense; secondly to remember that he is dealing with opinions, specifically at 401a4-5 the opinions of men. This is where Hermogenes comes in. For Hermogenes has already been shown to be a lover of δόξαι,²⁶ and for the most part Socrates is content to leave him to direct the course of the inquiry, eager as he is to collect more δόξαι. The etymologies are thus not a Platonic excursion, but an investigation into the opinions of men, led by a natural doxographer.

In turn this leads us to the encyclopaedic nature of the etymologies. Within this part of the dialogue we are given in effect a sourcebook for various Greek ideas and thinkers, an aspect of the dialogue that Goldschmidt demonstrated in detail.²⁷ Indeed there is no shortage of references by name to poets, philosophers and others: to Homer, Hesiod and Orpheus;²⁸ to Anaxagoras and his followers;²⁹ to Heraclitus;³⁰ and of course to Cratylus and Euthyphro. In addition there are more shadowy figures: οἱ μετεωρολόγοι,³¹ τοῖς ἀμφὶ Εὐθύφρονα,³² τινές,³³ (οἱ) πολλοί,³⁴ οἱ κομποὶ περὶ μουσικὴν καὶ ἀστρονομίαν,³⁵ and οἱ νῦν περὶ Ὅμηρον δεινοί.³⁶

As yet these references do not amount to much; I shall look more closely at them in context below. What I wish to stress here is that they cover a wide range of authorities of various sorts, and point to the encyclopaedic nature of the etymologies. If one considers the arrangement of the etymologies, the development from divine names through those of elements to ethical and intellectual terms, in this light, one can see that they form a general schematic

²⁶ See my remarks in 1.3 above. At 384a4-7 he is eager to hear Socrates' opinion on the correctness of names; at 384c9-e2 he declares that having discussed the matter with many others as well as Cratylus in the past, it *seems* to him that his convention theory is correct, though he is ready to listen and learn to anyone at all (παρ' ἄλλου ὅτουσιν, 384e2) on this matter. Note also the concentration of forms of δοκεῖν at 386a5ff. Cratylus' first words in the dialogue, εἴ σοι δοκεῖ at 383a3 can thus be seen as pointing to a fundamental aspect of Hermogenes' character.

²⁷ Goldschmidt, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 90-142.

²⁸ Homer: 391c8-393b6 *passim*; 402b4-5; 410c1-2; 417c8; Hesiod: 396c4; 397e5-398a6; 402b6; 406c7 and 428a1-3; Orpheus 402b6-c1, οἱ ἀμφὶ Ὀρφέα 400c5.

²⁹ 400a8-10, 409a7-b1, 413c5-7; οἱ Ἀναξαγόρειοι, 409b6.

³⁰ 401d4-5, 402a4-c3, 440c2, e2.

³¹ 396c2, 401b7-8, see also μετεωρολογῶν, 404c2.

³² 400a1.

³³ 400c1.

³⁴ 403a5-6, 404c5, e1.

³⁵ 405d2.

³⁶ 407a9-b1.

view of Greek thought, starting naturally enough with Homer (a deliberate snub to the Sophists perhaps?³⁷) and his opinions on the correctness of names, and moving on to other areas of Greek thought.

This needs more detail. The point of starting with Homer is not only that he is the foundation of Greek literary education,³⁸ and Greek scholarship starts with the study of his text, but also that he himself believes that some names at least are naturally correct, an example being Ὀδυσσεύς, from ὀδυῖομαι or ὀδύσσομαι (*to be wrathful against, hate*). Later poets followed in his footsteps.³⁹ We start then appropriately with the biggest authority of them all, who etymologized (and allegorized) himself and thereby encouraged others to do likewise.⁴⁰ In this context the discussion of Homer's views of the correctness of names could be seen as a parody of the study of Homeric γλῶσσαι, or difficult words that need to be explained,⁴¹ whilst having the serious purpose of distinguishing between the divine correct language and that spoken by men. And the first series of etymologies, tracing the ancestry of Orestes back to Ouranos himself, are in the spirit at least of the etymologizing of proper names in the poets⁴² and also presumably the scholars of the fifth century.⁴³

The primacy of Homer amongst the Greeks had interesting consequences as the epic world picture began to be challenged. Critics of the ethical value and general world-view of the Homeric poems like Xenophanes presented a real challenge to those who wished to preserve the poet's reputation;⁴⁴ one means of meeting the threat was to allegorize the poet to explain away theomachies and the like. Theagenes of Rhegium, said to have been the first to write on Homer,⁴⁵ is reported to have reinterpreted the theomachy so as to make it more acceptable; whatever the truth of this report, Plato rejects theomachies in the

³⁷ See 391b9-d1.

³⁸ H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, translated by G.R. Lamb, third edition (London, 1956), pp. 9-10, cf 166-169.

³⁹ For a (presumably incomplete) list of etymologies and word-plays in archaic poetry and in Aeschylus see O. Lendle, *Die „Pandorasage“ bei Hesiod* (Würzburg, 1957), pp. 117-121. Lendle makes a distinction between etymologies, serious attempts to reveal the true derivation of names, and word-plays that merely play upon chance similarities between name and thing; this distinction seems to me rather dubious; the difficulty scholars have in deciding whether the *Cratylus* etymologies are 'serious' or not should warn us of the problems in making such distinctions.

⁴⁰ For this and other details in this and the following paragraphs see R. Pfeiffer, *A History of Classical Scholarship, From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 3-15.

⁴¹ A fragment of the earliest comedy of Aristophanes, the *Δαιταλῆς*, dating from 427 B.C., preserves the examination of a boy in Homeric glosses (fr. 222 K.); see Pfeiffer, p. 15.

⁴² The famous Aeschylean etymology of Helen as ἑλένας, ἑλάνδρος, ἑλέπτολις at *Agamemnon* 689-90 for example would fit very well into these etymologies in the *Cratylus*.

⁴³ Goldschmidt, op. cit. p. 101 argues that Plato is here presenting to us '<< une trace >> de la philologie homérique' of the fifth century, comparing Socrates' interpreting of the poem of Simonides in the *Protagoras*.

⁴⁴ Xenophanes DK 21 B 11, 14, 15, and 16

⁴⁵ DK 8 A 1, 2.

Republic, with or without ὑπόνοιαι, or ‘hidden meanings’.⁴⁶ On the other hand, those who wished to advance new views but in traditional form could interpret ancient texts like that of Homer (and, as we shall see, the so-called “Orphic” texts) in an allegorical way so as to ‘reveal’ those new ideas.⁴⁷ What etymology can do is to add credence to an allegory, by demonstrating a more direct link between the name and the its hypothesised allegorical meaning.⁴⁸ It is no surprise therefore that one sees allegory creeping into the divine names.⁴⁹

The moving on to the ‘physics’ section thus marks a move away from theology in Greek thought to lesser ‘divinities’, the stars, elements and so on, in which the Presocratics of course showed particular interest. And the use of etymology continued: Anaxagoras is reported by Aristotle to have etymologized αἰθήρ;⁵⁰ indeed his followers it seems were great devotees of allegory and etymology, as I shall discuss below. Note also the way in which Plato pokes fun at people who study the stars, thinking they are studying the really divine: at 397c4-d6 Socrates explains θεοί by deriving it from θεῖν, ‘to run’, saying that the first Greeks and most contemporary barbarians thought the heavenly bodies, moving always in a regular orbit, were the real gods; later the same name was used for the Olympian gods. Moving on to 408d6ff Anaxagoras and his followers are clearly implicated in such studies; they are presumably no better informed about the nature of the divine than barbarians and those early Greeks.

From thence we come to names in the domain of ethics, intellectual states and emotions, gradually moving further away from the divine sphere (and thus the etymologies become more and more fluxy). This is more the arena of the Sophists and Socrates and Plato, who after all wrote whole dialogues on the search for the nature of σωφροσύνη (the *Charmides*), ἀνδρεία (the *Laches*), and above all δικαιοσύνη (the *Republic*). The move from the sphere of physics to ethics is an important step; the Sophists and Plato are in competition here.

Thus the etymologies can be seen as a schematized developmental picture of Greek thought, appropriately enough when we consider that it is Hermogenes, the man who loves collecting δόξα, who is largely responsible for the course they take. The descent from the divine to the fluxy human realm is then matched by the implicit temporal decline from the wisdom of Homer to the foolishness of Sophists who dare to put themselves on a level with him as

⁴⁶ *Republic* 378d3-7.

⁴⁷ An example is the Derveni commentator to be discussed in 5.6 below.

⁴⁸ See O.C.D. s.v. Allegory, Greek, where etymology is described as ‘the handmaiden of this pseudo-science [sc. allegory]’.

⁴⁹ A good example is the discussion of Ἥρα at 404b9-c4 where one etymology is ἐρατή (sc. of Zeus), a ‘traditional’ interpretation one might say, the other is ἄρη, a ‘physicalist’ allegory/etymology of the goddess.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *De Caelo* A 3, 270b24-5 (= DK 59 A 73).

educators.⁵¹ This 'descent' can be seen in the following etymologies: ἵῆρα is derived from ἀήρ, then ἀήρ from αἶρει, αἶεῖ ῥεῖ, or ἀητόρρουν;⁵² ἵῆρας is linked to τὸ ἄρρεν and τὸ ἀνδρεῖον, but τὸ ἄρρεν to ἡ ἄνω ῥοή⁵³ and ἡμέρα is derived from ἱμεῖρειν / ἱμερος, ἱμερος from ἰέμενος (the desire for things in flux drags the soul along).⁵⁴ The direction of the etymologies is firmly headed one-way towards the human and the flux-ridden; each stage takes us further along this path, with no reference back to the divine. The next step will then be to analyze each name into its constituent πρῶτα ὀνόματα, reaching the limits of rest and flux, in the movements of the tongue, voice and mouth. Implicit is the problem of how this process can be reversed; how can one, starting from these mimetic movements, reach Olympus? In other words, the problem of reconciling the two methods rears its head again.

The apparent high praise of Homer should make us wary. So why precisely does Plato make the etymologies into this encyclopaedic overview of Greek culture? Or to put it another way: if Plato is parodying contemporary etymologists, why do the etymologies reveal these δόξαι?

4.2 *The Target(s) of the Etymologies*

There are two distinct questions to be disentangled here, one relating to the content of the etymologies, the δόξαι that they reveal, the other to their provenance. One might claim that Plato is interested in showing how etymology can elicit all kinds of opinions from names, demonstrating a point about language, namely its unreliability in resolving questions of essence. This, by implication, would be Brumbaugh's interpretation.⁵⁵ In effect one is saying that Plato is responsible for both the form and content of the etymologies, producing etymologies according to the theory Socrates has outlined. The opinions that appear are thus incidental to the main point. They may indeed be a true picture of the world of appearance, but they fail to capture reality, the world of Forms.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Protagoras goes so far as to call Homer and Hesiod Sophists like himself, who were afraid to declare their profession openly, unlike him (*Protagoras* 316c5-317c5).

⁵² 404c2-4 and 410b1-5 respectively.

⁵³ 407c9-d2 and 414a1-3 respectively.

⁵⁴ 418c5-d5 and 419e3-420a4 respectively.

⁵⁵ I say by implication because in his short article Brumbaugh does not discuss the issue of how the δόξαι that emerge are related to contemporary thought at all. Doubtless he would not wish to hold to this implausible view. Gaiser, op. cit. pp. 45-80, thinks that Plato has a variety of targets in the etymological section, but he is interested in a different aspect of the etymologies, what he sees as the hypothesis of a similarity in 'Bewegungsstruktur' between language and reality.

⁵⁶ In support of this claim one might refer to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *de compositione* 16, arguing that there Dionysius says that Plato is responsible for the etymologies, and so we should

The polar opposite of this view is to say that he is more or less accurately parodying an actual etymologist or etymologists. There have been various candidates offered over the years, the favourite being Antisthenes, though some point to Prodicus and Protagoras, and indeed Cratylus himself;⁵⁷ Euthyphro has been suggested as being behind at least the divine etymologies,⁵⁸ and Warburg argued that the etymologist in Plato's sights was Heraclides of Pontus.⁵⁹ The problem as always, is finding evidence that reinforces any of these claims.

The former approach would ignore the aspects of parody that can readily be found in the text and ignore the evidence for etymologizing amongst the Greeks; it would also leave the references to known theories and thinkers without any real point. The latter would make Plato into too much of a proto-Diogenes Laertius for comfort, requires us to assume that most of the evidence for the sources of Socrates' etymologies have disappeared, and conflicts with the evidence for Platonic inventive reworking of his 'sources', which I shall discuss below. Both lines fail in addition to account fully for the encyclopaedic nature of the etymologies; why, if either is the correct interpretation, has Plato produced quite this range of opinions, covering the history of Greek speculations?

This is where Goldschmidt's approach is quite different. He sees Cratylus as an eclectic neo-Heraclitean who has picked up bits of theory about etymology, the impossibility of contradiction, etc; throughout Greek culture he sees the traces of flux and thereby the truth of Heraclitus' Flux doctrine, and in etymologizing he is merely taking to an extreme the tendency latent in his master's book (see fr. B 25, 32 and 48 in particular). This interpretation reveals a unity in the etymologies, fitting the third section especially well, and gives the dialogue a plausible aim, that of exposing a mistaken view of the world pervading Greek culture. An added bonus is that it shows why the dialogue should be called the *Cratylus*, particularly if one accepts Aristotle's report that Plato was once Cratylus' pupil: Plato is marking a decisive break from his

not look for parallels for them in surviving Greek writings. Goldschmidt discusses the point, pp. 91-96; he rejects the argument, preferring to assume that the earlier etymologists' work (specifically, in his interpretation, that of Cratylus) have disappeared.

⁵⁷ Most notably, Goldschmidt, op. cit.

⁵⁸ See Steiner, art. cit.; he also suggests that Antisthenes was the target for the ethical and intellectual etymologies.

⁵⁹ M. Warburg, *Zwei Fragen zum << Kratylus >>* (Berlin, 1929); Warburg's thesis relies on altering the conventional chronology of Heraclides' life and reading much into the supposed similarity between etymologies reported as his and those of the *Cratylus*. He could find only one concrete example. Recently Thesleff has argued unconvincingly in support of Warburg; see H. Thesleff, *Studies in Platonic Chronology*, Societas Scientiarum Fennica, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 70 (Helsinki, 1982), pp. 168-9. At the very least it seems fair to dismiss Heraclides as a major target of the etymologies. See also H.B. Gottschalk, *Heraclides of Pontus* (Oxford, 1980), p. 5, n.15, and Appendix 2, pp. 160-162.

former mentor's views, combining a frontal assault on the flux doctrine with private business of a sort.⁶⁰

Despite these advantages this interpretation faces major objections. Firstly the fluxy tendency of the etymologies is interrupted by 'Platonic' exceptions, above all in the divine names, and the degree of flux varies considerably.⁶¹ Secondly, Cratylus himself is not, unlike Euthyphro, linked to the etymologies, and there is no such evidence elsewhere. The two references to him in the *Metaphysics*, at 987a32-4 and 1010a10-15, stress flux not etymology. Thirdly, and I think most conclusively, there is a strategic point: the flux issue is carefully left undetermined at the close of the dialogue, with Cratylus stubbornly holding to the flux doctrine and Socrates urging him to rethink the matter. Thus the point of the etymologies cannot be to show up a mistaken view of the world if the end of the dialogue means what it says. This is not to claim that Socrates does not argue against an extreme version of the flux doctrine, merely to say that he does not present the refutation of any theory of flux as an achievement of the dialogue.

What is decided is that etymology is an unreliable tool in seeking knowledge about things.⁶² This is the major positive result from the etymological inquiry, and it is here that one should seek the unifying feature of the etymologies. This unifying feature is indeed the exposure of a culture-wide error, not concerning flux, but rather language and its relationship to reality, an error which is set in the context of a schematic history of the development of Greek thought. So many theories and thinkers are represented because the use of etymology to 'prove' a point was an unthought assumption of poets and philosophers from Homer to the Sophists. This assumption amounts to a version of Cratylus' error: that of taking the existing language and treating it as though it fulfilled the prescriptive ideal. Plato is *creatively* borrowing from a wide range of sources, but adding much else, producing a parody of Greek etymological practices.

This interpretation preserves Brumbaugh's insight into the overall point of the etymologies whilst accounting for the encyclopaedic nature of the etymologies, Goldschmidt's great contribution. Note however that the eclectic person has turned out to be Hermogenes, not Cratylus. Hermogenes, as I have tried to show, is someone who delights in discussing ideas with all-comers, a habit that seems to leave him with no very firm opinions, whereas Cratylus maintains a Delphic silence through much of the dialogue,⁶³ and dogmatically sticks to his

⁶⁰ Goldschmidt, *op. cit.*, pp. 90ff. The Aristotelian report is at *Metaphysics* A, 987a 32-b1. Cf 1.5 above for a discussion of the 'problem of Cratylus'.

⁶¹ See 4.3 d) below. Gaiser, *op. cit.*, argues that the etymologies show degrees of flux, good and bad.

⁶² 439b6-8.

⁶³ 383b8-384a4.

Heraclitean tenets to the bitter end.⁶⁴ Characterizing Hermogenes as the eclectic who wishes to hear all the opinions Socrates can muster is closer to how the two are presented to us. This interpretation has the advantage that there is now no suggestion that Plato is attacking some straw man, a silly theory of naming, at unnecessary length, rather that he is fighting a battle against a widespread confusion. This battle is one that Plato lost, as the subsequent history of Greek etymology shows.⁶⁵

To make this plausible I have to show that those references to thinkers and ideas that occur in the text have an important function, pointing the reader in the direction of those guilty of opportunistic etymologizing. This I shall endeavour to do below, where I discuss examples of 'Platonic "borrowings"'. Firstly, some possible objections. One might say that if the principal enemy is, as it seems to be, Heraclitus and his followers, to read in various other targets clouds the issue. Yet a look at *Theaetetus* 152e2-9 suggests an answer to this charge. There Socrates says that all the σοφοί except Parmenides believe everything to be in flux. We can say therefore that Plato is showing at length here what he there only asserts, that almost all philosophers to some degree or other think that things are in flux; the major point is however that they consider names and their meanings not to be in flux. This point is one that is of great importance in understanding Cratylus' claims in the last part of the dialogue.

One could well object to this interpretation on the grounds that we have no evidence for anything more than occasional dabbling in etymology; that no theory can be assumed for Plato's predecessors. At best perhaps a few Greeks were particularly prone to word-games of this sort, but no more than that can be shown. The etymologies are Plato's creation, the space Plato devotes to them a rare lapse of literary judgement.

This is virtually a counsel of despair, yet there is no need to accept this depressing conclusion from those premises. Let us go back to Dionysius of Halicarnassus. He it was who declared that Plato was the first to εἰσαγγεῖν λόγον on etymology. Unlike previous writers who used etymology in a highly selective and self-serving way, Plato in the *Cratylus* investigated the use of etymology properly, the rationale being that if one is to use etymology to reinforce an argument or even discover things at all then one is assuming that

⁶⁴ 440d7-e7.

⁶⁵ The Stoics are the obvious example; Chrysippus according to Diogenes Laertius (vii, 200) wrote at least eleven books on etymology, and Augustine's description of the Stoic theory of etymology in *de dialectica*, chapter 6, reminds one very strongly of the *Cratylus* etymologies, a point demonstrated in detail in K. Barwick, *Probleme der stoischen Sprachlehre und Rhetorik*, Abhandlungen der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, philologisch-historische Klasse, Band 49, Heft 3 (Berlin, 1957), pp. 70-79; cf Origen *Contra Celsum*, 1 24 (=SVF 2.146). The Stoics' devotion to etymology has been questioned in Long-Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 volumes (Cambridge, 1987), 1, p. 195; for my purposes it is enough to claim that interest in etymology continued unabated, despite Plato's onslaught.

one is dealing with a naturally correct language in the way that Cratylus does. This is a hypothesis of great importance that cannot be taken as read.⁶⁶ Thus the general lack of evidence for etymological theory pre-Plato is important for my case: there is little evidence because there was little interest in arriving at a theory to back up the practice, only the almost unconscious opportunistic use of etymology.⁶⁷

One now can furnish a second reason as to why the etymologies take up so much room. Not only had many people made the error of over-valuing names, but to refute them properly (or indeed to prove the hypothesis that Greek was a natural language) a thorough survey of names had to be undertaken. The etymological section, for all its disorder and chaos, follows the spirit of the tool analogy argument: if language, specifically the Greek language, is assumed to be the product of a skilled namegiver, the results must be subjected to a thorough examination, and all kinds of names of all kinds of things must be laid open to scrutiny.

If one adopts this interpretation, one need not necessarily assume that for every etymology one can, or could in theory, find a Greek thinker or poet who produced a recognizably similar one. Plato is to some extent at least 'filling in the gaps'; at other points he is recognizably alluding to etymologies attributable to other thinkers, sometimes he can be seen to 'improve' existing etymologies, or produce differing, and for the thinkers concerned, unfortunate, results, demonstrating the unreliability of etymology. The general thesis is thus that Plato etymologizes in the spirit of a whole variety of different thinkers, poets and divines, demonstrating how they got the relationship between language and reality all wrong.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ One could object that some names correctly interpreted could genuinely reveal the truth, even if the state of the language is generally poor; yet that will not suffice. For once one admits that even a very few names are not well-formed then the ideal of gaining knowledge or proving opinions through etymology is lost; one will always have to check the etymology against the nominatum to avoid being misled, in which case there is no need to consider the name at all.

⁶⁷ This is not quite true. The *Derveni Papyrus* commentary has on Burkert's interpretation at least the materials for justifying the use of etymology as part of the expression of cosmic *νοῦς*; and there are possibly the materials in what we know of Prodicus for some kind of etymological theory (based on language and reality matching each other one-to-one). In the one case however there is a belief in effect in a *deus ex machina*, a device that Socrates deplores (425d5-8); and in the other there is no sustained attempt (as far as we know) to put the theory to the test. I shall discuss both of these 'exceptions' at greater length in Chapter 5.

⁶⁸ Remarks made by Pfeiffer in the course of discussing the *Cratylus* point in the same direction, and are worth quoting at length: searching for the essence of things through examination of their names 'looks like the old task of ἐτυμολογία, familiar from Homeric times as an innate striving of the Greek mind to understand and explain the ὀνόματα, particularly the ancient proper names of gods and men; the poets were followed by the philosophers (Heraclitus, Democritus), historians (Hecataeus, Herodotus), and the Sophists (Prodicus, Hippias?), who occasionally and arbitrarily tried their hand at this traditional game. The Platonic Socrates, on the other hand, started a methodical and consistent inquiry into the fundamental problem "whether the names themselves

This raises however a host of questions about the nature of Plato's use of his 'sources'. Granted that he is no mere doxographer, what is the relation between his targets and his text? Several commentators have drawn a parallel between Socrates the etymologist and Socrates the literary critic in the *Protagoras*, where Socrates subjects Simonides' poem to scrutiny.⁶⁹ Undoubtedly Plato is making a related point there about the impossibility of tying down the written word in interpretation, and his dismissal of poetry as a subject for discussion chimes with the rejection of the study of names in the *Cratylus*. This, however, does not get one much further. Heath's suggestion that we should see the etymologies as playing a rôle similar to that of myths in other dialogues, being an imaginative illustration of the possibilities of etymological interpretation, is similarly suggestive, but rather vague as it stands.⁷⁰ What is required now is a few examples to illustrate Plato's method in the etymologies, to show how Plato draws on other thinkers, yet transforms that material for his own polemical purposes; this, I suggest, offers a way of approaching the other etymologies.

4.3 Platonic Borrowings

a) 399d7-400b7: *A Debate on the Nature of Soul*

In the case of the discussion of ψυχή there is some doxographical material that sheds some light on Plato's method of adapting his sources. Aristotle reports that the theory that the soul is hot is supported by an etymology from ζῆν, whereas the theory that it is cold is supported by an etymology from ἀναπνοή and κατάψυξις;⁷¹ Philoponus reported that Hippon claimed that the soul is cold, and therefore water, deriving ψυχή from ψυχρός. It is responsible for τὸ εἶναι through being the cause of cooling us as we breathe. He also identifies Heraclitus as the source for deriving ζῆν from ζεῖν.⁷²

Plato combines elements of both these positions in Socrates' first etymology of ψυχή. Soul is responsible for life, but through providing the power of

will bear witness that they are not at all given at haphazard, but have a certain correctness [translating 397a]". Pfeiffer, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.

⁶⁹ *Protagoras* 338e6-347a5. For the parallel, see, eg, R.H. Weingartner, *The Unity of the Platonic Dialogue: The Cratylus, the Protagoras, the Parmenides* (Indianapolis/New York, 1973), p.38, n.34.

⁷⁰ Heath, *art. cit.*, p. 201.

⁷¹ *Ar. De Anima* A 2, 405b26-29.

⁷² See DK 38 A 10. Kahn (in *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 337, n. 398) rejects the attribution to Heraclitus, presumably because in the surviving fragments ζῆν seems to be linked to Zeus in B32.

breathing, and refreshing one (by cooling down). The reference to Hippon is backed up by the reference to οἱ ἀμφὶ Εὐθύφρονα thinking this etymology to be vulgar, φορτικόν; Aristotle regarded Hippon as one of the φορτικώτεροι for thinking that the soul is water.⁷³ A reference to Heraclitus is suggested by the idea that the soul is αἷτιον ... τοῦ ζῆν, which recalls Ζεὺς being αἷτιος ... τοῦ ζῆν at 396a6-8 and also B 32: ἔν τὸ σοφὸν μῦνον λέγεσθαι οὐκ ἐθέλει καὶ ἐθέλει Ζηνὸς ὄνομα.⁷⁴ Combining these passages gives the possible etymological series Ζεὺς–ζῆν–ζεῖν to support the claim that soul is fiery: it must be, if it truly is responsible for life. Whether this is based on a now lost part of Heraclitus' book, or, more probably, on later thoughts of his followers, is another matter.⁷⁵

If this speculation is accurate, Plato is alluding to an etymology in the Heraclitean tradition only to use instead another, anti-Heraclitean, etymology before rejecting that in its turn. This should warn us against viewing the etymologies in any way as narrowly Heraclitean. It also demonstrates the general claim I am making in a very clear way: in philosophical/scientific disputes etymology was freely applied, as though it could offer some genuine support for scientific theses. As Philoponus remarks, each side ... καὶ ἐτυμολογεῖν ἐπιχειρεῖ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄνομα πρὸς τὴν οἰκείαν δόξαν, a comment that would serve as a motto for the entire etymological section.

The second etymology of ψυχή derives it from φύσιν ὅχει καὶ ἔχει, and Anaxagoras is mentioned as holding the view that the soul διακοσμεῖ the nature of everything. Goldschmidt stresses that Anaxagoras is not linked to the etymology itself, and also suggests that Plato may have had Pythagoreans in mind too, making τεχνικώτερον probably a reference to the etymology being the work of an initiate.⁷⁶ This seems to me unlikely. The tool analogy argument stressed that namegiving is a skilled activity, and this etymology is ironically said to be more 'technically correct' because, despite its bizarre appearance, it can be said to set forth the semantic elements that taken together make up the complex name. Anaxagoras and especially some of his followers seem to have been enthusiastic allegorists and etymologists, as I shall discuss further below; even if Plato did not have a specific etymology of ψυχή in mind, an etymology that 'reveals' Anaxagorean doctrine like this in effect claims that Plato can do better than they themselves. I shall suggest another possible case of this later.

⁷³ *de anima* A 2, 405b1-5. Aristotle says that such men seem to be persuaded of this from the fact that semen is liquid, which might seem to conflict with Philoponus' report; but perhaps the cooling quality of the breath and the ψυχῇ–ψυχρός etymology provided Hippon with more ammunition for his claim. The tradition that he was an atheist would also make him suspect to the religious, see DK 38 A 2,4,8,9.

⁷⁴ For a defence of the etymological reading see Kahn, *op. cit.*, pp. 269-270.

⁷⁵ It is easy to see how such an etymology could arise from reflection on fragments like B 36, it is death for souls to become water, etc.

⁷⁶ Goldschmidt, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.

Socrates' attitude to all this is made abundantly clear, both by the use of κομψεύμενον and by his statement at 400b6-7.⁷⁷ All in all, one can conclude that the nature of the soul cannot be settled by etymology, producing as it does such unacceptable results.

b) 400b8-c9: *The Nature of the Body*

Several different derivations for σῶμα are suggested: firstly we are told that τινές say that it is a tomb for the soul; then that it is what the soul uses to give signs, deriving it from σῆμα, 'sign'; and thirdly οἱ ἀμφὶ Ὀρφέα derive it from σῶζειν: the body keeps the soul safe whilst it pays for its sins. Another interpretation of this third etymology is to say that the body is a prison (δεσμωτηρίου εἰκόνα, 400c7). All three etymologies are, on the face of it, not far-fetched.

The τινές of the first etymology seems a reference to Pythagoreans like Philolaus. At *Gorgias* 493a1ff Socrates recalls listening to a wise man claim both that we are dead and our bodies tombs for our souls, and that the part of the soul where the appetites reside is easily won over and liable to go this way and that; some clever man, perhaps a Sicilian or an Italian,⁷⁸ allegorizing (μυθολογῶν) the theory with the help of an etymology (παράγων τῷ ὀνόματι), likened that part of the soul to a pitcher (πίθος) because it is πιθανόν and πειστικόν. In addition, fools are the uninitiated, or 'leaky', because they have 'leaky' souls which have to be replenished by repeatedly satisfying their appetites.⁷⁹

Viewing the *Cratylus* passage in this light leads one to suspect that Philolaus (and presumably other Pythagoreans) took up the σῶμα-σῆμα, body-tomb thesis, and backed up the theory with the *Cratylus* etymology, or others like it, given the indications in the *Gorgias* of a liking for allegory and etymology.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ The use of κομψός and cognate words in the dialogue seems in general to be ironic. Thus in talking about the inspiration of Euthyphro at 399a3-5 Socrates says he appears to have thought things out κομψῶς, and he describes the problem of not-being at 429d7-8 as being κομψότερος λόγος for him at his age. Note also the use of γελοῖον at 400b6 and compare 425d1-3; in both cases the results of taking etymology seriously seem ridiculous but are the price of testing the natural theory on Greek.

⁷⁸ The Sicilian is usually said to be Empedocles and the Italian Philolaus; see Goldschmidt, p. 118; Dodds however, in his commentary ad loc., agrees that the σοφός is most probably a Pythagorean but denies that we can identify him (*Plato, Gorgias* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 297-8).

⁷⁹ ἀμύητοι being derived from ἀ-μύειν, 'unstopped'. Dodds, op. cit., p. 302, doubts that any such word-play is intended; it does however fit the tone of the passage, with yet another word-play on Hades being derived from ἀδής, 'invisible', just below.

⁸⁰ One should beware here of drawing too strict a distinction between allegory and etymology; see my comments in 5.2 a) below.

Yet on closer inspection the latter passage appears to be a Platonic confection. The body-tomb thesis and the leaky soul do not naturally fit together; and even if Philolaus is the Italian, the σῶμα-σημα theory is not his: in fragment B14 he attributes it to παλαιοὶ θεολόγοι τε καὶ μάντιες. Thus one should be wary of Plato's motives here.

The same moral applies to the *Cratylus* passage. Indeed, Ferwerda plausibly argues that the second derivation, σῶμα-σημα (body-sign), represents the authentic Pythagorean tradition, and that Plato is deliberately foisting upon them the tomb thesis, which does not cohere with what we know of Pythagorean doctrine from other sources.⁸¹ This suggests that Plato is misrepresenting the Pythagoreans as holding the σῶμα-σημα theory in both passages; yet he is aided in this misrepresentation by their apparent fondness for etymology and allegory.⁸² For if one is going to use etymology at all, what makes the 'body is a sign' derivation preferable to the σῶμα-σημα thesis? Nothing in the names themselves points one way or the other.⁸³

Plato is also playing tricks, claims Ferwerda, with the Orphic tradition; interpreting περίβολον (c6) as 'protecting structure' he sees the suggestion that the body might amount to a prison as a deliberate misrepresentation on Plato's part. Again we could say if σῶμα is something that keeps the soul safe, then why should the etymology not point towards 'prison'? If these suggestions are accurate, the moral for the etymologies is more or less, beware: etymology is a double-edged sword. In Chapter 5 I shall point to other etymologies which I suggest work in a similar fashion.

c) *Cratylus 402a-c: Ancient Heracliteanism*

In this passage Socrates discusses the ancestry of the Heraclitean flux doctrine, saying that the great poets, Homer, Hesiod and Orpheus, all subscribed to it. This in itself is a means of depreciating Heraclitus' own contribution to the theory that, in Plato's dialogues at least, is most associated with him,⁸⁴ and

⁸¹ R. Ferwerda, 'The Meaning of the Word ΣΩΜΑ in Plato's *Cratylus* 400c', in *Hermes* 113 (1985), 266-279.

⁸² Some evidence that Philolaus used etymology (which perhaps thereby supports identifying him as the *Gorgias* κομψὸς ἀνὴρ) can be found in a report that he argued, contrary to most others, that φλέγμα is hot, deriving it from φλέγειν (DK 44 A 27, = Menon, Anonymi Londin. p. 31). See also 5.7 below.

⁸³ Indeed σημα as tomb is derivative from σημα as a sign: the tomb is a sign to mark the dead.

⁸⁴ At 409a6-c2 there is a similar joke played in connection with Anaxagoras' theory that the moon reflects the sun's light, when Socrates claims that etymology itself reveals the theory. Plato is fond of this sort of joke; cf *Protagoras* 340e8-341a2 where he suggests that Prodicus' claimed novel expertise in making verbal distinctions is really an ancient one, going back at least as far as Simonides, perhaps even further.

chimes with the *Theaetetus* references to the universality of the flux doctrine.⁸⁵ There is more at stake however. Bruno Snell, in a famous article,⁸⁶ argued that there is a common source for *Cratylus* 402a-c and Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A 3, 983b20-984a5, namely a book by the Sophist Hippias; he points to DK 86 B 6 where Hippias is reported to have written a book consisting of excerpts from all kinds of writers. Snell argued moreover that Plato was joking when he made these excerpts into a reference to antecedents of the flux doctrine of Heraclitus, and that Aristotle is correct in reporting a reference to Thales and his antecedents. He denied that this could lead us to the source for the etymologies themselves however.

Snell's interpretation has been generally accepted. In a recent paper Mansfeld has challenged the claim that Plato changed the reference to Heraclitus: the poetic material on examination fits neither Heraclitus nor Thales terribly well, but both Plato and Aristotle are writing in polemical style, and both take what suits them from Hippias. The Hippias fragment B6 declares that he is collecting together τὰ μέγιστα καὶ ὁμόφυλα, important and related ideas; there is no suggestion that he was interested in the logical coherence of the ideas, rather it seems likely that he cited Thales' view that all things come from water alongside the river fragment of Heraclitus, bringing these philosophical and scientific theses together with 'similar' views in the ancient poets on rivers being the genesis of the gods, which he interpreted in an allegorical fashion.⁸⁷

If Mansfeld is right, then Hippias is the earliest source for Heraclitus, not Plato,⁸⁸ and the importance of the flux doctrine for Heraclitean exegesis is reaffirmed. As far as the *Cratylus* goes, if Hippias was indeed interpreting the poets in this allegorical fashion that would make him a potential target, on the grounds that etymology is a frequent accompaniment of allegory; the etymology of Τηθύς that immediately follows could conceivably be a parody of his own efforts. (I shall have more to say on allegory/etymology of the poets in Chapter 5.) Amongst Hippias' many accomplishments was knowledge of the δυνάμεις and ὀρθότης of letters (γράμματα), syllables, rhythms and harmonies,⁸⁹ so it is quite plausible that he did indulge in such etymology. Plato also pokes fun at Hippias' fondness for creative interpretation of literary texts at *Protagoras* 347a6-b3, where Hippias is eager to tell everyone his own

⁸⁵ *Theaetetus* 152e2-9, 179e2ff.

⁸⁶ B. Snell, 'Die Nachrichten über die Lehren des Thales', *Philologus* 96,3 (1944), 170-182.

⁸⁷ J. Mansfeld, 'Cratylus 402a-c: Plato or Hippias?', in *Atti del Symposium Heracliteum 1981*, edited by L. Rossetti, 2 volumes (Rome, 1983), i, 43-55.

⁸⁸ The matter is complicated by the Heraclitean echoes in the Derveni Papyrus, which could well be earlier than Hippias' book. See 5.6 below and cf W. Burkert, 'Eraclito nel Papiro di Derveni: due nuove Testimonianze', in *Atti del Symposium Heracliteum* (see note 88), i, 37-42.

⁸⁹ DK 86 A 11, 12 (= Plato, *Hippias Major*, 285b7-286a2; *Hippias Minor*, 368b2-d7 respectively).

opinions about Simonides' poem; Alcibiades however tells him to save it for another time.

Still lacking however is firm evidence that Hippias did indeed indulge in etymology. Perhaps less controversial is the claim that Plato is indulging in just the sort of collecting together of δόξαι and thinkers that Hippias seems to have done, picking out the details that suited him, allegorizing and so on, for a polemical purpose. Conjecturally one might say that the etymological section itself brings together τὰ μέγιστα καὶ ὁμόφυλα from the words of the poets and prose writers of Greek, making a καινὸν καὶ πολυειδῆ ... λόγον.⁹⁰

If this conjecture is near to the mark, Plato is meeting Hippias on his own ground. The point of such an exercise for Plato is, I would claim, to parody a mistaken attitude to 'authorities', whereby they are sources of material to be ransacked to support one view or another. The belief that Homer and the other ancient poets were inspired and could therefore be allegorized and etymologized *ad libitum* to find the 'truth' is one of the widespread fallacies that Plato was trying to refute. A reference to Hippias based on what little we know about him, makes sense in this regard; in Chapter 5 I will give more examples of this credulous attitude towards the authorities of Greek culture.

d) 403a5-404b4: *Hades and Anamnesis*

Socrates here rejects the common etymology of ᾍιδης that derives it from ἄ-ιδές, *unseen*, causing most people to fear the god.⁹¹ In fact, Hades binds the souls of the dead with the strongest possible bond, not necessity but desire, more precisely, the strongest desire of all, that of becoming a better person. Far from being someone to be feared, Hades is a great benefactor of those in his realm, being a τέλειος σοφιστής, who likes the company of souls because it is then that they are free of the body and the accompanying uncontrollable desires. His name should really be derived from πάντα τὰ καλὰ εἰδέναι.

This etymology strikes one as far-fetched and highly ironic, and it is hard to believe that anyone could profess it seriously. Plato however does have a serious point to make, which emerges when one recollects a passage in the *Phaedo*, namely, 80d5-7. There Socrates accepts the etymology *unseen* for Hades but reinterprets the meaning of Hades itself, which in the true sense of the term is like the (pure) soul, truly incorporeal and noble. Souls that are still

⁹⁰ DK 86 B 6 (= Clem. *Strom.* vi 15). Note that Hippias there claims to include non-Greek writers as well.

⁹¹ This traditional etymology is handed on by people like the tragedians; cf Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1080-1082, and see my comments on Aeschylus in 5.8.

contaminated with bodily stuff do not go down to Hades, but remain close to the visible world, haunting graveyards and tombs.⁹²

Philosophical knowledge is to be found in an incorporeal state in both dialogues, when humans can mix with the divine gods,⁹³ and the emphasis in the *Cratylus* passage on the soul being pure and unmixed with bodily desires both before and after 'death' is reminiscent of the *Phaedo* eschatology.⁹⁴ These similarities lead one to suspect that there is an (ironic?) allusion to anamnesis here: when our souls are free of our bodies we mix with Hades the all-knowing; this intellectual liberation opens up the possibility of acquiring (philosophical) knowledge and, perhaps, of learning a language fit to express that knowledge. This then would be a rationalising of the theology, reinterpreting the old stories and traditions about Hades so as to align them with sound Platonic doctrine.

Quite what Plato's intentions were if this is indeed a reference to anamnesis is problematic. One point that can safely be made is that the etymologies do not reveal exclusively unplatonic ideas; but there is reason to be wary here. If names are natural, they can reveal the natures of things, in other words, they can lead us back to that knowledge which, according to the theory of anamnesis, we possessed in our disembodied state but have since 'lost'. An etymology that recollects for the reader the theory of Recollection thus points the way to anamnesis simply through names, rather than via the careful geometrical demonstration of the *Meno* or other dialectical exercises. This for Plato must surely be a case of 'pseudo-anamnesis'. This etymology thus alludes to the temptations of playing with names rather than engaging in true Socratic dialectic.⁹⁵ Whether Plato is hinting that adopting (genuine) anamnesis is the way forward or whether it is an ironic reference is another matter.

Another element is a parody of the sort of people that Socrates takes to task in the *Phaedrus*, those who waste a lot of ingenuity on reinterpreting the old stories like that of Boreas abducting Oreithyia.⁹⁶ Socrates thinks it idle to try to rationalise the myths, preferring to believe in τῷ νομιζομένῳ.⁹⁷ Most notably, he points out that once one starts on this road, logically there is no turning back, rather one must rationalise all the myths.⁹⁸ Interestingly in the etymologies Socrates does go through the names of the major deities, but he does not 'rationalize' them all by any means. What he does do is to go through a long list of names to try to verify the natural theory. Unless all names in a

⁹² 81b1-d4.

⁹³ Thus the gods, if no-one else, use the correct names, 391d7-8, cf 400d6-9

⁹⁴ Cf also *Rep.* 9, 580d1ff, where Socrates discusses the different kinds of desires felt by the three parts of the soul.

⁹⁵ Cf my remarks on the threat to Socratic definition offered by etymology in 3.3 above.

⁹⁶ Referred to as οἱ σοφοί at 229c6. In Chapter 5 I will make some suggestions as to who was rationalizing myths in this way.

⁹⁷ 230a2.

⁹⁸ 229b4-230a6.

language are shown either to be naturally correct, or at least corrupted natural names, the hypothesis that Greek is a natural language is of no practical import, for no single name can be trusted to be natural of itself.

However one reacts to these suggestions, the main moral to take away from this passage is that all kinds of opinions can emerge through etymology, depending on the interpreter's wishes, as Socrates shows throughout the etymologies. Simply because this particular example is a 'Platonic' etymology has no bearing by itself on the truth or falsity of the thesis it presents.

4.4 *Conclusion*

What the above series of 'case-studies' is designed to do is to give some idea of the nature of Plato's parody in the etymologies. It is in no way 'fair'—the merest hint of an interest in etymology leads to a 'guilty' verdict. Plato twists the material whichever way he wants: sometimes he 'proves' the contrary to what some thinker used etymology to show, at other times he reveals a thinker's doctrine by some particularly ludicrous bit of etymologizing, and on occasion he 'proves' Platonic theories too. (Etymology is so attractive precisely because it can 'prove' almost anything.) This reworking of other men's efforts is what makes pinning one person or theory down as the 'source' for a particular etymology so difficult: Plato is no mere doxographer but makes creative use of the resources at his disposal. He draws on a wealth of sources, but in another sense the etymologies are pure Plato. Behind the display of linguistic trickery however Plato has a very serious point to make: once one starts to rely on language one cannot control the results. If etymology produces embarrassing consequences, that is the fault of its fair-weather friends.

This then answers some otherwise intractable questions. The etymologies are numerous, reveal many different opinions and refer to or hint at many people because they are dealing with a crucial error in the work of many Greek poets and thinkers. Anyone who seems to have cited an etymology in favour of some theory or belief is fair game, for they are in a muddle over names: names can only be at best poor imitations of things and can never take their place. They have invested names with the kind of stability that belongs to essences. At the extreme of this tendency is Cratylus, but there are many other lesser sinners. In the chapter that follows I shall try to track down some of the latter.

CHAPTER FIVE

ETYMOLOGIES AND ETYMOLOGISTS

In this long, and alas somewhat unwieldy, chapter I shall offer a more thorough survey of possible ‘targets’ of the etymologies. We do receive some help on this score: Plato makes various references to poets, thinkers and more shadowy figures like οἱ μετεωρολόγοι, and I will use these as cues for the various sections, attempting to keep in the midst of the disorder of the etymologies a roughly chronological order. After an initial discussion of Euthyphro and his role in the etymologies I will continue with Homer, some philosopher-poets and ‘philologists’, move on to the followers of Anaxagorean and Diogenean theories, and finish with the Sophists. This treatment thus approximates to the division of the etymologies noted above into three broad groups of names, the ‘divine’ names, those concerned with ‘physics’, and those concerned with the virtues and vices.

What I hope to make more plausible is the hypothesis that Plato is tackling a wide variety of targets because he is battling against what he sees as a culture-wide mistaken belief in the power of names, a belief sanctioned by the poems of the great Homer himself, and surviving in different manifestations down to Plato’s own day. A point that will emerge during the chapter is that much of the time it is the less well-known thinkers who are under suspicion, those whom one might call the ‘second-leaguers’, often the over-enthusiastic followers of greater figures. This is probably not an uncommon phenomenon in the history of ideas.

One might object in advance to my hypothesis that it has to presuppose a highly-educated audience to understand all the hints and allusions to contemporaries and past thinkers. Indeed it does presuppose such an audience; but that is no serious objection. Plato can be highly esoteric. Much of what is baffling to us was in any case probably clear enough to Plato’s readers.

For the present attention will be largely focussed on the divine names. It is appropriate then to start with the figure of Euthyphro, the expert on things divine.

5.1 *The Inspiration of Euthyphro*

Euthyphro is referred to as in some sense or other the inspiration for Socrates' etymological extravaganza on various occasions, particularly in the divine section of the etymologies.¹ There is no good reason to doubt the identification with the eponymous interlocutor of the *Euthyphro*: he claims to know τὰ θεῖα better than anyone else,² which matches what appears to be his main area of interest in the *Cratylus*, and Socrates' ironic comments about the etymologies chime with the mocking reaction that the audience in the ecclesia give Euthyphro when he tries to divulge the results of his μαντεία.³ Several verbal reminiscences of the earlier dialogue in the *Cratylus* positively support the identification;⁴ in addition Euthyphro uses the stories of Ouranos, Kronos and Zeus to justify the prosecution of his father and it is just after the etymologies of those very names that he is mentioned in the *Cratylus*;⁵ and the description of him filling Socrates with daimonic wisdom and reaching into his very soul is an ironic account of an encounter with a μάντις.⁶ In effect Socrates has been his pupil for a morning, something he shows himself keen to be in the *Euthyphro* when he learns of Euthyphro's claim to know τὰ θεῖα.⁷ In what follows I assume that the Euthyphro in both dialogues is the same man.

If Socrates has indeed learnt from Euthyphro, how much of the etymological section should be attributed to his unhappy influence? Here two questions need to be kept distinct. Firstly, how far has Euthyphro influenced the 'form' of the etymologies, the way in which Socrates actually etymologizes? Secondly, how much, if any, of the content of the etymologies is to be traced back to his beliefs? Or are both sorts of influence at work? Various scholars have seen Euthyphro as the main influence in both respects on the divine etymologies, to be replaced by other influences later.⁸ This seems to me

¹ 396d4-397a1; 399a1; 407d8-9; 409d1-2; and 428c7-8.

² 4e9-5a2.

³ 3b9-c2.

⁴ 401b1 ἀφ' Ἑστίας ἀρχώμεθα cf ἀφ' Ἑστίας ἄρχεσθαι, 3a7; 410e3 πόρρω ἤδη οἶμαι φαίνομαι σοφίας ἐλαύνειν cf πόρρω πον ἤδη σοφίας ἐλαύνοντος, 4b1-2.

⁵ 395e5-397a1.

⁶ Cf 3e3 ὅμιν τοῖς μάντεσιν.

⁷ 5a3ff.

⁸ Eg A. Steiner, 'Die Etymologien in Platons *Kratylos*', in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* N.S. 22 (1916), 109-132; K. Barwick, *Probleme der stoische Sprachlehre und Rhetorik*, Abhandlungen der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, philologisch-historische Klasse, Band 49, Heft 3 (Berlin, 1957), pp. 73f.

mistaken; I shall argue that in a sense Euthyphronic inspiration pervades the etymological section, whereas his influence upon the content of the etymologies is negligible at best.

To start with the form, or in a broad sense, 'style' of the etymologies, the description of the effect that Euthyphro has on Socrates is important. Socrates says his oracular wisdom came upon him because of Euthyphro, to whom, he declares, *παρεῖχον τὰ ὦτα*. In the process he was filled with a daimonic wisdom, a wisdom which he will today allow to run its course and tomorrow purify with the help of a priest or a Sophist. De Vries points out that this idea of purification is ambiguous: 'Purification is needed after contact with higher powers, but no less after pollution.'⁹ When Socrates says that he lent Euthyphro his ears however the reader should beware: the phrase *παρεῖχον τὰ ὦτα* is equivalent to *ἀκούειν*, and elsewhere in the dialogue there is plenty of material to suggest that listening on its own is inadequate.¹⁰ The result is that Euthyphro has not only filled his ears but also his soul with daimonic wisdom.

The implication is clear: the results of the etymologies cannot be trusted. This does not mean they are necessarily false—inspiration and *μανία* can reveal the truth, but only divine madness vouchsafes a vision of the Forms, and Euthyphro's inspiration will not give us that. Who then will purify us after etymologizing in this vein? Surely neither a priest nor a sophist. The only figure competent to do that is the *διαλεκτικός*, the man who knows a proper name when he sees it, who is, as it were, a significant absence throughout the rest of the dialogue.¹¹

Plato is therefore taking Euthyphro to task once again for claiming knowledge of the divine, this time through 'inspired' etymology. Given Euthyphro's theological and mythological interests, the common view that Euthyphro is the major influence on the style and content of at least the divine names would seem to make sense. Boyancé indeed went further, arguing that Euthyphro's handiwork is writ large in the etymologies in the form of a particular system of ideas, which he calls the doctrine of Euthyphro.¹² This system is mystic Pythagoreanism: witness the divinity of the celestial objects, of the seasons and the year; the linking of music and astronomy in the inquiry into *Ἀπόλλων*, calling to mind the harmony of the spheres; the circling motion of Pan, and so on. Boyancé also claims that the figure of the *νομοθέτης* is of Pythagorean origin, pointing to a saying reported by Iamblichus to the effect that the second most

⁹ G. J. De Vries, 'Notes on Some Passages of the *Cratylus*', in *Mnemosyne*, iv, 8 (1955), 290-297 (p. 294).

¹⁰ See section 1.4 above.

¹¹ That the dialectician lies behind the purification reference is also suggested by K. Gaiser in *Name und Sache in Platons <Kratylos>*, Abhandlungen der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften (philosophisch-historische Klasse), 1974, 3. Abhandlung, p. 50.

¹² P. Boyancé, 'La <<Doctrin d'Euthyphron>> dans le *Cratyle*', *Revue Etudes Grecques* 54 (1941), 141-175.

wise thing is ὁ τοῖς πράγμασι τὰ ὀνόματα θέμενος.¹³ In general the point to notice is that this theory assumes that Plato took Euthyphro seriously and adapted his mystic ideas to his own ends.

There are various objections to be made to Boyancé's thesis. Firstly, for no very compelling reason, Euthyphro is declared to be a propounder of this 'system' of ideas; we simply do not know enough about Euthyphro to make any such claim.¹⁴ If anything, the Euthyphro of the *Euthyphro* seems rather too steeped in traditional religion and mythology to approve of Pythagoras. Secondly, Boyancé's thesis of a Pythagorean background makes sense for some of the etymologies that he examines (not a very great number of the total), but not for all, leaving the problem of how to explain the resulting mélange of etymologies.¹⁵ Plato is creative in his borrowing, taking existing materials and transforming them; a contemporary Pythagorean would probably be rather upset at the resulting farrago being presented as his creed. Thirdly, identifying the νομοθέτης of the *Cratylus* with this shadowy Pythagorean figure is highly dubious: the saying of Iamblichus could well be post-Plato, and even if it is not, there is no good reason to identify the namegiver of the *Cratylus* solely with the Pythagorean νομοθέτης. That there are elements of Pythagoreanism I do not of course wish to deny, nor the relevance of a possible Pythagorean namegiver, nor indeed that Plato admired some elements of Pythagorean thought;¹⁶ what is to be rejected is the idea that amidst the dross there is a system of Pythagorean ideas in which Plato believed.

In general, both the restriction of Euthyphro's influence to the divine section and seeing him as the major influence on it seem to me mistaken. Whilst there are plenty of religious-style etymologies that would appeal to Euthyphro in this section, there is no shortage of others that presumably would not. When Socrates introduces an alternative etymology for ψυχή at 399e4-400a1 on the grounds that the friends of Euthyphro would find it more acceptable, it is hard to resist the feeling that there are many more they would object to elsewhere.¹⁷ Assuming, plausibly, that Euthyphro was a historical figure who had some interest in etymology as a means of interpreting the names of the gods, some

¹³ Iamblichus, *de vita pythagorica*, 82.

¹⁴ Boyancé accepts this point insofar as he is willing to drop the link with Euthyphro so long as the hypothesis of the Pythagorean background is retained (p. 170).

¹⁵ Boyancé tries to reconcile the Pythagorean with the Heraclitean etymologies by using the *Theaetetus* passage that claims everyone bar the Eleatics is a supporter of flux (*Thi.* 152d2-e10) (pp. 165ff).

¹⁶ I shall explore possible Pythagorean targets further in 5.7 below.

¹⁷ This might seem to beg the question, what sort of etymologies are 'Euthyphronic'. It does not have to however. To take the example of the two etymologies of Hera at 404b9-c4, Ἥρα-ἀήρ and Ἥρα-ἐρατή, one could not argue that the two are reconcilable to each other. The divine etymologies cover a variety of approaches to the divine, including allegory of one sort or another and what one might call mythological interpretation; they cannot be reduced to one particular system, be it 'Euthyphronic' or any other.

of the etymologies of the divine names may well be reminiscent of Euthyphro's own efforts, but no more than that. Thus Euthyphro's influence on the content of the divine etymologies, the beliefs expressed, is at best very limited.

Yet things are different as far as his 'inspiration' is concerned. Although Euthyphro is not referred to by name between 409d1-2 (when it appears his influence is waning) and 428c6-7, there are indications that his influence is somehow still felt. Thus at 407d6-9 Socrates urges Hermogenes to leave the divine arena and turn to other less hubristic etymologies so that he might see the mettle of Euthyphro's horses. The implication surely is that what follows the divine etymologies is no less due to the inspiration of Euthyphro. Support for this can be found in the horse-racing metaphor which Goldschmidt points out is used here and elsewhere: at 414b2-3 Socrates remarks that he is carried off the course when he gets on to the flat, and at 420d3 he is running the last lap.¹⁸ Right through the etymologies then Socrates is carried along on the horses of Euthyphronic inspiration. The remark that Euthyphro's inspiration might have deserted him at 409d1-2 is not damaging to this claim; the point is that $\pi\hat{\upsilon}\rho$ is a foreign word which not even inspirational etymology can account for. Finally, Socrates' determination not to give up this 'force' whilst it is present at 420e3-4 is surely a reference to the continuing presence of Euthyphronic inspiration; one recalls his assertion at 396c5-d1 that if he could remember the genealogy of Hesiod he would go on and on until he had tested thoroughly this wisdom that had suddenly come upon him.

Thus Euthyphro's inspirational presence extends throughout the etymologies. What though does this mean in terms of the method or form of the etymologies? Goldschmidt believed that the figure of Euthyphro 'a pour fonction de justifier la forme de l'exposé étymologique plutôt que le fond.'¹⁹ Both the gathering race-like pace of the etymologies and their 'dithyrambic' character²⁰ is to be attributed to the influence of this 'devin'. The etymologies are to be thought of as Cratylan in content, Euthyphronic in form. The first claim is, I believe, mistaken; the second deserves further development.

The first point to make is that 'form' here does not refer to an etymological method, rather the manner in which Socrates etymologizes. If this is so, why does Plato think that Euthyphronic inspiration is necessary for Socrates' etymological investigation? An answer can be found by concentrating on what we can reasonably assume of Euthyphro, namely that he is a self-appointed expert on the gods who uses some kind of divine possession or 'inspiration' as part of his mantic technique. This is the inspiration that he is said to communicate to Socrates. Now inspiration has both good and bad aspects: it can reveal truths, but its presence inevitably puts the etymologies under suspicion, and

¹⁸ Goldschmidt, p.108-109.

¹⁹ Goldschmidt, p. 107.

²⁰ See 409c3; 417e6-418a1; 418d4-5.

makes fresh examination of them necessary. Gaiser compares Platonic myths, whereby important philosophical truths are imparted. He sees the mask of Euthyphronic inspiration as telling us that higher truths are being hinted at, truths which must be extracted from Socrates in other ways.²¹

There is no need to embrace any esoteric doctrine however. The question to ask oneself is why Plato should think that an 'inspired' religious figure was appropriate to initiate Socrates into the secrets of etymology. The prescriptive-descriptive distinction is relevant here again. Earlier I remarked that the proper person to purify one of the inspiration of Euthyphro would be a dialectician. That assumes that such a man exists, someone who could put the prescription for language into practice. Such a man would be able to ask the right questions, sort out which names were correct and which not, securing the beneficial results of inspiration by rational means, fitting the demands of the prescriptive theory.

As things stand we lack this wise man and are lost in the confusions of existing languages. Only the gods can be relied upon to use correct names for everything.²² This being so, mantic powers are appropriate when trying to bridge the divide between gods and men. To claim a knowledge of correct names such as Cratylus and Euthyphro implicitly do is thus a claim to the possession of a 'gods' eye view', namely the ability to discern the essences revealed in names, to see language, the mirror of nature, in its full glory. And this extends beyond the range of the divine names: any correct name is in a sense the property of the gods. Thus when Socrates describes the wisdom that Euthyphro imparts as daimonic²³ this is not mere hyperbole, but points forward to 397d9-398c4, where δαίμων is derived from δαήμων: the δαίμονες are φρόνιμοι, wise men, wise beyond (ordinary?) human capabilities. They are of the golden race, not the iron. Implicitly, only when one is in an inspired state, such as Socrates is due to Euthyphro's influence, can one hope to attain this wisdom.

Recall that at the very opening of the dialogue Hermogenes asks Socrates to interpret the μαντείαν of Cratylus.²⁴ Cratylus believes that the ideal language, the divinely inspired tongue, is for the most part realised in Greek; lacking the dialectical means to demonstrate the correctness of the language he adopts an oracular pose, in the spirit of Heraclitus himself. This is however another symptom of his failure to distinguish between an ideal language and the reality of Greek. If Greek were truly a correct language, it would be susceptible to rational analysis, not the uncertainties of μαντεία. Thus by the end of the dialogue, unable to explain why Greek is apparently so ambiguous, he lamely takes refuge in the gods as the givers of the πρῶτα ὀνόματα.²⁵

²¹ Gaiser, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-53.

²² The gods, we have been told, use the correct names for things, 391d7-e3, 400d6-9.

²³ 396d6-8.

²⁴ 384a4-5.

²⁵ 438c1-4.

Now we have a role for Euthyphronic inspiration: the etymological move asserts that one can ‘read off’ the essence of the *nominata* from their names and in that way read the language of the gods in that of men. Socrates has been filled with just that hubristic desire; unlike Cratylus he is aware of the need for purification after this display. To reiterate my earlier caveat: I am not suggesting that Euthyphro in any way teaches Socrates the natural theory that is outlined in the tool analogy argument; what he passes on is not the rational theory, but rather the hubristic desire for divine knowledge through inspiration. Socrates knows that to realise the ideal one needs the wisdom of the dialectician and the skill of the namegiver; it is an admission of failure that as things stand he has to call upon Euthyphronic inspiration.

Having discussed Euthyphro it is time to go back to the beginning of the etymologies and not coincidentally of Greek literature, to explore the relevance of Socrates’ remarks on Homer.

5.2 *Homer and the Philosopher-Poets*

a) *Homer on the Correctness of Names*

Having rejected the idea of learning about names from the Sophists, Socrates, somewhat to Hermogenes’ surprise, suggests learning from Homer.²⁶ As I have pointed out before,²⁷ Homer’s text was the foundation of Greek education and culture, and despite philosophical attacks from the likes of Xenophanes,²⁸ Heraclitus²⁹ and especially Plato his influence continued unabated throughout Antiquity. Given the conviction that his text was a source of knowledge, many were tempted to allegorize and etymologize it to release that wisdom. Nor was this attitude totally foreign to the poet’s intentions, as the etymology of *Odysseus* shows;³⁰ and the Polyphemus incident in book nine of the *Odyssey*

²⁶ 391b9-d3.

²⁷ See section 4.1 above.

²⁸ See DK 21 B 11, 12, cf 14, 15, and 16.

²⁹ DK 22 B 42, 56.

³⁰ The etymological play on *Odysseus*’ name, deriving it from *ὀδύσσομαι* or *ὀδυόμαι* (‘to be angry with’) occurs several times in the *Odyssey*; it is used of Zeus’ hostility towards *Odysseus* at i 62 (Stanford in his commentary ad loc. translates ‘why so much odium for *Odysseus*?’), and Poseidon’s enmity at v 340, 423, and xix 275. That Homer intended this (false) etymology is demonstrated by xix 406-9 where Autolycus, asked to name his grandson, says let his name be ‘Ὀδυσεύς, ‘child of woe’, since he (Autolycus) has hated (been hated by?) many. Note the uncertainty over whether *ὀδυσαμένος* in xix 407 is active or passive; the controversy over whether *Odysseus* was fated to be hated or to hate dates back to the Homeric commentators. For a discussion see W.B. Stanford, ‘The Homeric Etymology of the Name *Odysseus*’, *Classical Philology* 47 (1952), 209-213.

demonstrates the importance attached to names and naming. It is only when Odysseus thinks that he has safely escaped the Cyclops that he drops the οὔρις conceit and gives his full name, patronymic and birthplace included. Yet even then this act of pride costs him dear: Polyphemus curses him using those exact words to his father Poseidon and the terms of that curse are fulfilled, with Odysseus losing all his men and ships before reaching Ithaca again. When Odysseus came amongst the Phaeacians he shows that he has learnt his lesson: it is only after avoiding several attempts to find out his name, when he is certain that he is amongst friends, that he reveals his true identity.³¹

For Homer and his audience names had a special power: Odysseus had by his act of defiant pride sowed the seeds of disaster, giving Polyphemus the power of knowing his name, for names pin the bearer down, revealing an essential part of them. The discussion of Ἑκτωρ and Ἀστυάναξ / Σκαμάνδριος in the *Cratylus* is thus not inappropriate. The sense of the magic of names we see emerging here is for Plato however the root of the problem he is tackling in the etymologies, the over-valuing of names in comparison with things, the inverting of the relationship between name and thing. In similar fashion Socrates before his denunciation of μίμησις points to Homer as the teacher of the other poets and thus implicitly as the originator of the problem.³²

Homer's pre-eminence in Greek literature was never threatened, but his archaic 'world-view' did come under attack in succeeding generations. In response to changing ideas allegory and etymology were increasingly employed, often in very dubious ways, as men tried to keep intact Homer's traditional authority by reinterpreting his text. In other words, the sense of the power of names was transferred to the favoured text, the supreme authority. The ancient tradition has it that Theagenes of Rhegium was the first to write about Homer and to allegorize him, the latter in response we are told to attacks on the immorality of tales about the gods. He apparently interpreted the theomachies as the 'battles' of physical elements; none of his allegorical efforts survive.³³ The dating of Theagenes is controversial; Tate argued that Pherecydes of Syros was earlier and suggested he was the first allegorizer of Homer.³⁴ The evidence is so scanty that no definite decision can be made.

Tate also rejected the traditional view that allegory arose as a defensive reaction to safeguard the reputation of the poets, arguing instead that thinkers who wrote in epic style found it easy and convenient to reinterpret the canonical

³¹ For discussions see N. Austin, 'Name Magic in the *Odyssey*', in *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 5 (1972), 1-19; C.S. Brown, 'Odysseus and Polyphemus: the Name and the Curse', in *Comparative Literature* 18 (1966), 193-202; A.J. Podlecki, 'Guest-Gifts and Nobodies in *Odyssey* 9', in *Phoenix* 15 (1961), 125-133.

³² *Republic* X, 595b9-c2, cf 598d7-8, 607a2-3.

³³ DK 8 A 2.

³⁴ J. Tate, 'The Beginnings of Greek Allegory', *Classical Review* 41 (1927), 214-215.

texts to suit their own theories. Thus a defence of allegorical interpretation of Homer given by Heraclitus the Allegorist (1st century A.D.?) was simply that Heraclitus and Empedocles wrote in mythical style and were philosophers therefore Homer, since he wrote in mythical style, was a philosopher too (chapter 24).³⁵

Whether or not Tate is right on the historical question of the origins and main focus of Greek allegory, this 'positive' allegorizing was, it seems, reasonably common and is very important for the background of the *Cratylus* etymologies. This attitude can be seen particularly amongst Anaxagoras and his followers: Anaxagoras himself is said to have been the first to say that Homer's poetry was on the subject of virtue and justice, and Metrodorus his disciple allegedly took this attitude even further, extending it to physical matters;³⁶ Diogenes of Apollonia praised Homer for speaking truthfully about τὸ θεῖον, claiming that Homer implies that Ζεὺς represents 'air'.³⁷ By such argumentative gambits Homer was 'updated'. This is not etymology as yet, but it is not hard to see how this allegory could be made more attractive by means of an etymology, eg by arguing that Zeus is the cause of life (τὸ ζῆν), we need to breathe to live; hence Ζεὺς represents 'air'. This follows the pattern that was to be seen earlier in the derivation of ψυχῇ from ψυχρός.

A point that is important here is that we probably falsify ancient practice by insisting on too rigid a distinction between allegory and etymology, for both could be considered to be forms of ὑπόνοιαι, or 'undersenses'.³⁸ As such, one would expect allegorical interpretation to be frequently accompanied by etymologies,³⁹ and when one looks to the etymologies of the divine names one sees that rather than some being clear-cut allegories and the rest not, there is a gradation between plainly allegorical and those that one might call descriptive of the essence of the god. Other etymologies need merely a small addition to point an allegorical meaning. Thus Ἥρα is ἀήρ and Ἀθηνᾶ νοῦς, both of which are clearly allegorical; very similar is Ἄρης, 'manliness', 'courage';

³⁵ J. Tate, art. cit., and 'On the History of Allegorism', in *Classical Quarterly* 28 (1934), 105-114.

³⁶ DK 59 A 1, =D.L. II 11.

³⁷ DK 64 A 8 (= Philodemus *de pietate* 6b). Diogenes, believing that 'air' was the divine all-knowing substance, interpreted Homer's claim that Zeus knew everything as a reference to his own theory.

³⁸ Translating ὑπόνοιαι literally, as 'undersense', helps prevent one getting into the rather sterile debates about whether, say, Antisthenes was an 'allegorist' or not; we should ask rather to what extent did he or anyone else look for 'undersenses'. In any case, ἀλληγορία is a later word.

³⁹ Tate calls etymology the 'handmaiden' of allegory (O.C.D., second edition, s.v. Allegory, Greek, section 1). The link between allegory and etymology is also made by W. Burkert in a discussion of the Derveni Papyrus; he remarks 'il est clair que la méthode de l'étymologie est parallèle à celle de l'allégorie; on pourrait dire que l'allégorie étymologise le contexte d'une narration, l'étymologie allégorise le mot individuel.' ('La Genèse des Choses et des Mots: le papyrus de Derveni entre Anaxagore et Cratyle', in *Les Etudes Philosophiques* 25 (1970), 443-455 (p. 450).) Cf also 4.3 b) above.

Ἑρμῆς is almost equivalent to Λόγος, and Διόνυσος is not far from meaning 'wine', but the four-fold etymology of Ἀπόλλων is descriptive of his varying functions.

This continuum between allegorical etymology and the descriptive variety can best be made perhaps by looking at the etymologies of Ποσειδῶν. The first is ποσίδεσμον, a bond on the feet, referring to how the sea does not allow one to move forwards quickly; the second is πολλὰ εἰδότος, knowing many things as befits a god; and the third is ὁ σείων, recalling his epithet 'earthshaker'. The last is what one might call descriptive etymologizing in the epic tradition, revealing a well-known facet of the god's personality; the second I would see as a Platonic hint as to the true nature of divinity (cf the etymology of Ἄιδης); whereas the first is a rather forced attempt to reveal his sphere of influence, water. This is like the third 'shaker' etymology in a sense, but it also points towards an allegorical interpretation of Ποσειδῶν as meaning ὕδωρ.⁴⁰

Now if Plato is representing contemporary practice at all, this suggests that any searching for 'undersenses' readily extended to etymology. That Plato is drawing on existing material for his allegories seems certain—the allegories of Ἀθηνᾶ, Ἥρα and Ἑρμῆς all appear for example in the Homeric scholion referred to in note 40, and I shall have more to say on such material below; to what extent etymology was used to back them up is uncertain, though it seems extremely likely in the case of Ἥρα.

One could object that the evidence is better for allegory than for etymology, and so Plato is going beyond the efforts of most allegorists by using etymology. Possibly so; but this objection rests too heavily on that distinction between allegory and etymology which is arguably anachronistic for this period. In any case, if one is to read one's pet theories into a long-dead author, etymology at least supplies the possibility of providing a convincing case, deriving the theories from the very names themselves. After all, a given set of gods or heroes could be consistent with more than one allegorical interpretation. This point will be important.

In the next section I shall suggest that Plato's attack on allegorical interpretation of the poets in *Republic* II 376eff, combined with other remarks he makes about poetic inspiration, tally closely with the *Cratylus* critique of etymological interpretation, strengthening the case for seeing a close link between allegory and etymology. Before discussing that passage however, one further point is worth noting. When Socrates, to Hermogenes' surprise, claims that Homer had things to say about the correctness of names, what he uses Homer's 'authority' to introduce is the distinction between the names the gods use and those that men use, the prescriptive-descriptive distinction in another guise. Having left behind the abstract argument of the tool analogy passage and the ideal of the

⁴⁰ DK 8 A 2.

dialectician and namegiver, we are now in the midst of the reality of Greek. And so, just as earlier I remarked that Socrates has to rely on the dubious inspiration of Euthyphro in the absence of the dialectician, here too he has to use an unphilosophical aid, the 'authority' of tradition. This helps mark the transition from abstract prescription for language to the description of Greek itself.

b) *Plato's Attack on Allegory*: Republic II 376eff

In this part of the *Republic* Socrates is starting to discuss the education of the Guardians. Children, he says, are taught μῦθοι first of all, generally false stories that contain some truth. Since children are easily moulded in their ideas, they must be exposed to the right stories, not those of Homer and Hesiod, who tell ugly stories that, even if they were true should not be told to the young and impressionable. An example of this is the story of Kronos castrating his father Ouranos, another is that of the theomachies. They inculcate the wrong morals, and are not to be accepted in the city, οὐτ' ἐν ὑπονοίαις πεποιήμενος οὔτε ἄνεν ὑπονοίῳ. The reason is that children cannot tell what is an 'undersense' and what is not, and whatever they take in at that age is wont to be hard to root out. Thus one must take the greatest care that the first stories that children hear are calculated to encourage them in virtue. Such tales will be literally false, but not ugly like those of the poets. They will be written according to the right principles about the gods, avoiding such things as theomachies. This will ensure that the young are led along the path of virtue.

The point is that it will not do to tell children Homer's 'ugly' tales and then say that although these tales are literally false (of course the gods do not quarrel, lie, fight each other, etc), they are true in an 'undersense'. An allegorical interpretation could be true, but we cannot expect our impressionable young, once they have absorbed the bad literal sense and moral, to distinguish between allegorical truth and literal falsity.⁴¹

Problems with allegorical interpretation are not limited to children however. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates remarks that the labours involved in rationalizing myths are charming enough in their way but not for really serious thinkers; the man who spends his time in this way has a real job on his hands, for once one has explained one myth, another crops up, and he will have to explain that, using the same ἄγροικος σοφία. Socrates has no time for such activities, since he devotes himself to the search for self-knowledge.⁴² Plato does not deny that poets can speak the truth, but using divine inspiration as their guide they cannot

⁴¹ See J. Tate, 'Plato and Allegorical Interpretation', in *Classical Quarterly* 23 (1929), 142-54, continued in 24 (1930), 1-10.

⁴² *Phaedrus* 229c6-230a6.

give good reason for their correct opinions;⁴³ an inspired poet uses no τέχνη but is taken over by the god who speaks through him; it is not his work at all.⁴⁴

Poets are unreliable. To allegorize Homer is to assume firstly, that Homer was a philosopher; secondly that one can rationally interpret him by allegory. Both are highly dubious, especially the second: how can one rationally interpret what is written through inspiration, using no τέχνη? The whole basis of allegorical interpretation is suspect, for young and old alike.

One can now draw a parallel with the *Cratylus*. There too one is trusting that the given text (individual names in this case) is the product of a philosopher (the dialectician), and rationally interpretable by etymology; but why should we believe this when Socrates the etymologist is described in terms that recall to mind that paradigm of unreliability, the inspired poet?⁴⁵ Various etymologies may be true (as I have argued in chapter 4, some etymologies strike one as distinctly ‘platonic’), but to produce a coherent etymological interpretation of Greek would be a long and, one suspects, ultimately pointless activity; etymology is a charming enough diversion in its way, so long as one does not take it too seriously.

The two critiques are similar, yet one is bound to ask why Plato devoted a whole dialogue to tackle etymology. Here one needs to recall the attraction of etymology for allegorists, namely that it seems to provide decisive evidence for a particular allegorical interpretation. Allegory works usually over a fairly broad canvas and presupposes a coherent analogical theory, knowledge of which allows one to interpret something which is false at the literal level as true at the secondary, allegorical level. Thus knowledge of Anaxagorean and Diogenean physics allows one to interpret correctly the Orphic material in the Derveni Papyrus, at least according to the Derveni commentator. As such it cannot be completely rationally justified in that another coherent allegorical scheme could provide an interpretation that in terms of the text is just as appropriate. The motif of the divine inspiration of poets and their interpreters is a smokescreen, a variant on the *deus ex machina* evasion that Socrates censures in the *Cratylus*: faced with a problem of how to account for something one assumes a divine origin, which by the same token means one cannot explain it.⁴⁶

The crucial difference is that etymology can in theory be justified. Working with individual names it offers a direct language-reality link, a means of learning from names. One does not need to know the correct physics or

⁴³ *Apology* 22b8-c3; cf *Phaedrus* 278b7ff.

⁴⁴ *Ion* 533d1-535a2; cf *Phaedrus* 245a1-8

⁴⁵ In the *Apology* poets are referred to as ἐνθουσιάζοντες ὥσπερ οἱ θεομάντιες καὶ οἱ χρησμοφδοί (22c1-2), in the *Cratylus* Socrates is said by Hermogenes to χρησμοφδεῖν like the ἐνθουσιῶντες, 396d2-3.

⁴⁶ 425d5-426a3, cf 438c1-6.

whatever if one but knows the powers of names. Allegory by its very nature forces a separation between the surface meaning of a text and its 'true' meaning: 'allegorical interpretation repeatedly departs from the apparent meaning of the text, reinterpreting it in order to sustain a correspondence. Needless to say, this places a great strain on the text, and as the divergences widen, the allegory is liable to break.'⁴⁷ Etymology, by tying the allegorical interpretation more directly to the text, is a way of trying to repair that separation from the surface text. This is why etymology is allegory's handmaiden.

It is not only the handmaiden of allegory. In contrast to allegory, one can etymologize without accepting some grand theory, be it that of Anaxagorean and Diogenean physics or whatever; one can pick and choose which names to regard as being especially significant, instead of trying to keep an allegorical reading from breaking down. It is a game that anyone can play, and that many did. Allegory is a complex literary device, presupposing an author of some sophistication; etymology however has the appearance of something much more fundamental, a direct link between language and the world that is open to everyone to exploit. In fact, Plato will show that this piece-meal approach to etymology is mistaken, that etymologizing to support beliefs about the world presupposes some kind of theory about the relationship between names and things. It assumes that the namegiver was a dialectician and requires a systematic investigation of names if it is to be justified. In the end the two critiques are very similar, but the critique of etymology is an attack on a series of fallacious assumptions about how names and things are related. In contrast, the critique of allegory opens up no such fundamental philosophical questions. This then explains their relative lengths.

It is time to give examples of the sorts of reinterpretation of the Homeric tradition that I have been discussing. Firstly, I shall discuss two Presocratic philosopher-poets who reworked the epic tradition for their own ends, whose work perhaps Plato is hinting at in the *Cratylus*.

5.3 *Philosophical Allegory and Etymology*

a) *Pherecydes of Syros*

The heady mix of allegory, etymology and cosmology in the extant fragments of Pherecydes itself makes him an intriguing figure, whilst his reworking of traditional cosmogony and mythology, using allegory and etymology, makes

⁴⁷ J. Whitman, *Allegory. The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 3-4.

him a prime candidate for Plato's attention in the *Cratylus*.⁴⁸ An interesting fragment in this regard is DK 7 B5 (= Origen, *Contra Celsum* vi 42) which links two passages of the *Iliad* i 590 and xv 18. We are told that Pherecydes understood Zeus' words to Hera in the latter passage to be the words of god to matter, which god put in order; the region below, Tartarus, was where he sent rebellious gods, like Hephaestus. Tate sees this as reconciling two passages from Homer with a constructive allegorical interpretation;⁴⁹ this interpretation is lent some support by Aristotle's comment that Pherecydes did not tell everything μυθικῶς, suggesting that he did indeed remould and rationalize the myths.⁵⁰

Interestingly, the story related in the first *Iliad* passage, that of Hephaestus being thrown out of heaven by Zeus when he tried to defend his mother Hera from being beaten, is mentioned in the *Republic* passage discussed in 5.2 b) above as one of the obnoxious parts of Homer that cannot be taught to the young, whether it is allegorized or not. That it was allegorized is clear from Plato's criticisms, leading one to speculate that perhaps Plato had Pherecydes in mind there; if so, it would strengthen the case for seeing Pherecydes as a target of Plato's parody elsewhere.

Pherecydes' interest in etymology is plain from fragment B1. Three figures, Ζάς, Χρόνος and Χθονίη are presented as the three original principles, the last-named receiving the name Γῆ because Ζάς gave her γῆν as a γέρας ('present'/'prerogative'). Ζάς itself is an invented form of Ζεύς, presumably intended to stress the intensive prefix ζα-; Χθονίη is probably derived from χθών, representing the primitive role of earth; Χρόνος represents Kronos. By the latter stages of the theogony it appears that the three primaeva deities have assumed their familiar forms as Ζεύς, Κρόνος and Ἥρα (Χθονίη-Γῆ is thought of as Ἥρα, being the wife of Ζάς-Ζεύς). Thus the original three form etymological variants on the traditional theogonical figures.⁵¹

It is also quite possible that Pherecydes derived Χάος from χέεισθαί and so interpreted it as water; B1a reports that he made the first principle water and called it Χάος, and quotes Hesiod, *Theogony* 116, 'First of all Chaos came to be'.⁵² If so, this is an etymological allegory, just the sort of thing Plato seems to be attacking. An interpretation of B7 and 9 by Gomperz supports this: the

⁴⁸ There is a good discussion of Pherecydes in G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, second edition (Cambridge, 1983), 50-71 (hereafter KRS).

⁴⁹ J. Tate, 'The Beginning of Greek Allegory', in *Classical Review* 41 (1927), 214-215.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* N4, 1091b8-10 (= DK 7 A 7). On the other hand Proclus says Pherecydes' teaching (παράδοσις) is more 'riddling' (αἰνυγμωδέης) than Plato's (*In Tim.* 23c I 129, 15 Diehl, = Dk 7 A 12).

⁵¹ See KRS 56-57.

⁵² Cf A2. Though contra Sextus reports that he made earth his first principle (A10), and the report in B1a is an inference made by Achilles. Indeed, the etymology of Χάος from χέεισθαί is Stoic, and may simply have been attributed to Pherecydes.

former says that some interpreted ἔκπορῃ in Pherecydes as semen and Gomperz suggested that Chronos produced a series of primaevae deities from the ἔκπορῃ as his later form Kronos did from Rhea, or 'Πῆ as she is called in B9.⁵³ The etymology 'Πῆ from (ἐκ-) ρεῖν is attractive.⁵⁴ Thus primaevae water and Chronos' semen could have been linked; KRS suggest that whilst Χάος-water cannot have come first for Pherecydes, 'the special interpretation of Chaos may have been connected with Chronos' seed at a relatively early stage of cosmic development.'⁵⁵

Another strand in all this is supplied by the report in B3 (= Proclus, *In Tim.* 32c; II 54, 28 Diehl) that Pherecydes said that Ζεύς changed into Ἔρως when about to create, and the report A11 that talks of Ζάς and Χθονίη and the Ἔρως between them, which seems to suggest water at some point in the cosmology (deriving Ἔρως from ἐκ- or εἰσπεῖν). These presumably refer to the marriage of Ζάς and Χθονίη reported in B2, when Ζάς gives the cloth decorated with Γῆ and Ὠληνός to Χθονίη. Again we have what appears to be a cosmogony supported by allegory and etymology.

Whilst the exact details of Pherecydes' account cannot be recovered,⁵⁶ what we can assert is that he supported his reworking of tradition by means of allegory and etymology, arriving at a rather watery and fluxy cosmogony. Above I suggested that the strictures against allegorists in the *Republic* II passage might take in Pherecydes, and KRS point to a possible reference to him in the *Sophist* 242cd; interest in him was certainly alive in the fourth century B.C.⁵⁷ Turning back to the *Cratylus*, there are a few, not particularly attractive conjectures that one can make. At 402a4ff Socrates says Heraclitus' flux doctrine, as represented by the river fragment, is ancient, and that Homer held it too. The idea of a fluxy cosmogony can also be applied to Pherecydes, and it is notable that Πέα is implicitly derived from ῥοή or ῥεῖν here. If there is a link, this will complicate still further the background to this passage, already discussed above. At 420a9-b4 ἔρως is derived from ἔσπος, the flow being brought in through the eyes, but it is hard to pin this on Pherecydes. A more plausible suggestion is to relate the third etymology that Socrates gives of ἥλιος, εἰκοίκοι δ' ἂν καὶ ὅτι ποικίλλει ἰὼν τὰ γινόμενα ἐκ τῆς γῆς ...⁵⁸ to fragment B2, column 1, Ζὰς ποιεῖ φάρος μέγα τε καὶ καλὸν

⁵³ H. Gomperz, quoted in KRS p. 60, note 1.

⁵⁴ Note the comment in B9 that Pherecydes' use of 'Πῆ for Πέα is his own variant (ἴδιος ἢ χρήσις); this fits in with the idea that Pherecydes was reworking epic traditions. For the use of another idiosyncratic form to point to an etymology note in B2 Ὠληνός for Ὠκεανός to show that the latter is part of the earth's surface (KRS p. 62 note 2).

⁵⁵ KRS p. 60, note 1.

⁵⁶ There is more material of an allegorical kind that I have not considered.

⁵⁷ KRS p. 71, note 1, and p. 50.

⁵⁸ 409a4-5. Cf Goldschmidt, op. cit., p. 131.

καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ < ποικίλλει Γῆν > καὶ Ὠγῆ < νὸν...; ⁵⁹ a report in Lydus says that Pherecydes identified Zeus with ἥλιος, ⁶⁰ and the fact that the verb αἰολεῖν meaning ποικίλλειν is not attested other than in the *Cratylus* suggests that it could conceivably have been one of Pherecydes' idiosyncratic coinages.

Given the fragmentary remains of Pherecydes' books, perhaps the lack of firmer evidence is unsurprising, but arguments from silence are a very weak foundation on which to try and build anything. It seems to be a plausible claim that Pherecydes was one of the targets of Plato's parody, but beyond that it is impossible to say. That he was the sort of person Plato would be attacking is a safer claim.

b) *A Philosopher-Poet: Empedocles*

Empedocles also self-consciously reworked epic language and traditions in his poetry, whilst trying at the same time to meet the challenge of Parmenides. ⁶¹ There is a tradition that he rationalized and updated the myths about the gods, writing for example a hymn to Apollo that was on the nature of the sun. ⁶² Nothing from such a work survives, but the names of the divine 'roots' do illustrate the process of creative allegory/etymology that has been discussed above, and shed some light on the background of the *Cratylus*.

In B6 Empedocles reveals his four roots, calling each by a divine name. The importance of this has been stressed by Wright in her book on Empedocles: the poet uses these names to show that these roots are, by virtue of their unchanging nature, the new gods, worthy of the same respect paid to the old; the descriptions of the τιμαί of the roots and their equality of power recalls the language of Homer when describing the equality of treatment and privilege enjoyed by Zeus, Poseidon and Hades. ⁶³

There is however a controversy over the reference of each of the roots, going right back to Antiquity. One tradition is that of the Homeric allegorists, who

⁵⁹ The supplements are confirmed by Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* vi, 9,4.

⁶⁰ DK 7 A 9. Lydus was a historian of the sixth-century A.D.

⁶¹ Aristotle commented that the result was nothing like Homer save in metre, and that Empedocles was a φυσιολόγος, not a poet, *Poetics* I, 1447b17-18 (= DK 31 A 22).

⁶² Thus Heraclitus the Allegorist justified allegorizing Homer on the grounds that Heraclitus and Empedocles imitated the allegorizing of Homer, the latter in his revealing of the four elements, Ζεύς, Ἥρα, Αἰδωνεύς and Νῆστις (chapter 24, 6-7); Menander Rhetor calls him one of the writers of φυσιολογικοὶ ὕμνοι, in whose hands a piece on Apollo became a discussion on the nature of the sun (DK 31 A 23); Aristotle said that Empedocles wrote a prooimium to the sun (a fragment preserved in Diogenes Laertius viii 57, = A1); Ammonius *de Interpr.* 249, 1 Busse (= B 134) says that he rejected the traditional anthropomorphic accounts of the gods and substituted his own account of Apollo.

⁶³ See M.R. Wright, *Empedocles: the Extant Fragments* (New Haven, 1981), pp. 22-3.

identified Αἰδωνεύς with air and Ἥρα with earth;⁶⁴ the Homeric allegorists believed that Homer's wisdom was only open to initiates, and presumably supposed that the self-confessed ἰσόθεος Empedocles would interpret him accordingly, ie allegorically.

Both Wright⁶⁵ and Guthrie⁶⁶ argue that this reading of Empedocles is a later addition and that one should see Empedocles rather as reshaping the Homeric tradition. Αἰδωνεύς is a variant name for Hades, and therefore represents earth, supported by the more obvious etymology ἀ-ιδές,⁶⁷ and φερέσβιος could easily be applied to air.⁶⁸ The Theophrastean tradition makes Ἥρα air, Αἰδωνεύς earth and Ζεύς fire,⁶⁹ and this, Wright and Guthrie argue, is the most reliable as well as fitting Empedocles' iconoclastic self-image.⁷⁰

Νῆστις, a Sicilian water-goddess, represents water; Simplicius suggests that the name derives ἀπὸ τοῦ νάειν καὶ ῥεῖν,⁷¹ Hippolytus also identifies it with water but derives it from νῆστις 'fasting'; the reason he gives for this etymological allegory is that water, though the 'vehicle' (ὄχημα) of all nourishment, cannot on its own nourish things, for otherwise there would not be famine and hunger amidst an abundance of water.⁷² This seems not dissimilar to the interpretation suggested above of the ποσιδεσμον etymology of Ποσειδῶν, the etymology leading via a circuitous route to an allegorical interpretation.

Zeus represents some sort of fire according to all authorities. Here too etymology can enter in: Aetius equates πῦρ with ζέσις and αἰθήρ,⁷³ so Ζεύς-ζέσις is an easy step, and then to ζῆν, Ζεύς = heat = the cause of life.⁷⁴

The problem of course is how far one can read back this etymologizing/allegorizing into Empedocles. It seems very plausible that these reports are not

⁶⁴ Heraclitus the Allegorist 24,7; Diogenes Laertius viii 76; Hippolytus R.H. vii 29, 4-5. The latter etymologized Αἰδωνεύς to 'reveal' air: ὅτι πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ βλέποντες μόνον αὐτὸν οὐ καθορώμεν. Hera is earth presumably because φερέσβιος, the epithet Empedocles applies to her, is an epithet of earth in Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns.

⁶⁵ op. cit. pp. 164-166.

⁶⁶ *History of Greek Philosophy*, 6 volumes (Cambridge, 1962-1981), ii, pp. 144-6.

⁶⁷ Rejected by Socrates in the *Cratylus* at 403a5ff, attributing it to οἱ πολλοί. Note that the identification of Αἰδωνεύς with air is also supported by a variant on this etymology in A 33, lines 21-22: Αἰδωνεύς is air because it does not have its own light but is illuminated by the sun and moon.

⁶⁸ Contra: Snell ('Hera als Erdgöttin', *Philologus* 96,2 (1943), pp. 159-160) argued that φερέσβιος must refer to earth, and compared the epic phrase Ταρτάρου ἡερόεντα to parallel Αἰδωνεύς meaning air; one might add that Pherecydes makes Χθονίη marry Ζάς-Zεύς as a precedent for Ἥρα being identified with earth. See KRS pp. 57-8, note 2 for other isolated parallels for Hera as an earth goddess.

⁶⁹ See DK 31 A 33 (= Aetius I 3, 20).

⁷⁰ cf also the Menander Rhetor passage referred to earlier, which also suggests that Empedocles identified Ἥρα with air (A 23).

⁷¹ *In de an.* 68, 13-14 (=B 96, DK I 346, lines 3-4).

⁷² R.H. vii 29 (=A 33, lines 31-35).

⁷³ A 33.

⁷⁴ cf *Cratylus* 396a2-b3.

totally misinterpreting Empedocles on this score: he introduces obscure names for two of his roots, suggesting that the names are significant in some way; he is obviously allegorizing, and I have stressed the close link between allegory and etymology above; and most importantly perhaps Empedocles' claims of divine status makes it very likely that he would claim to know the truth hidden in names.⁷⁵ Thus with the allegorical reading of Ἥρα as 'air' perhaps the namegiver μετεωρολογῶν should bring Empedocles to mind.⁷⁶ Given the tradition of his 'physiological' interpretation of Apollo this would not be surprising.

Finally I shall offer another conjecture, again concerning Socrates' treatment of ἥλιος. The first etymology derives the Doric ἄλιος ...κατὰ τὸ ἀλίζειν εἰς ταύτῳ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐπειδὴ ἀνατείλῃ, recalling an Empedoclean line about the sun ἄλλ' ὁ μὲν ἀλίσθεις μέγαν οὐρανὸν ἀμφοπολεύει.⁷⁷ The verb ἀλίζειν is rare in prose; Plato seems here to be playing on its military sense 'to gather together (an army)' and also perhaps 'capping' the Empedoclean etymology with a different one of the same word, making the sun the active gatherer rather than a passive 'collected' ball. This improving of previous etymological efforts is something that seems to be going on quite often in the etymologies, and I shall suggest more examples below.⁷⁸

5.4 οἱ νῦν περὶ Ὅμηρον δεινοί: *Homeric Interpreters*

Having discussed the poets and poet-philosophers and how far they themselves indulged in etymology, it is time to move on to the next stage in this schematic 'history'. This section will focus on commentators and interpreters of various sorts who etymologized the 'sacred texts'. At 407a8-b1 Socrates refers to the 'clever interpreters of Homer' before etymologizing Ἀθηνᾶ as ἡ θεονόη. Allegory is at work: Athena, goddess of wisdom, is now identified with νοῦς

⁷⁵ For the claim to be equal to the gods see B 112.

⁷⁶ *Cratylus* 404b9-c4. LSJ translates the verb as 'to talk of high things, esp. the heavenly bodies or natural phenomena'; it is a rare word, with only one other use referred to. R.K. Sprague uses the *Cratylus* passage to support the identification here of Ἥρα with air in 'Empedocles, Hera, and Cratylus 404c', in *Classical Review* 22 (1972), 169.

⁷⁷ 409a1-3 and DK 31 B 41 respectively.

⁷⁸ See also Goldschmidt, pp. 130-1 for more relevant Empedoclean fragments. There is an etymology of ἥλιος Ὑπεριων attested for Xenophanes in Heraclitus the Homeric Allegorist, ἡέλιος δ' ὑπεριέμενος γαῖάν τ' ἐπιθάλλων, = DK 21 B 31; it is very tempting to connect this with the second etymology of ἥλιος in the *Cratylus*, περὶ τὴν γῆν αἰεὶ εἰλέειν ἰών, and perhaps the third, ποικίλλει ἰών τὰ γιγνόμενα ἐκ τῆς γῆς, comparing A 42 where Xenophanes is reported to have said that the sun is important for the γένεσις and διοίκησις of the κόσμος and the animals in it. Again Plato would have produced a 'capping' etymology. This would then mean that each of the etymologies of ἥλιος refers to a poet/thinker who in a sense 'rewrote' the language of epic.

and διάνοια, an identification supported by etymology. Contrast this 'clever' form of interpretation to the less ingenious variety. The run of the mill interpreters do what Greeks had always done, read off a description from a name. An example is the discussion of ὙἩρα: Zeus is said (λέγεται) to have been in love with her, hence the ὙἩρα-ἐρατή derivation; the alternative offered is the (Empedoclean) allegory ὙἩρα-ἀήρ. Other examples are the two common etymologies rejected by Socrates, the derivation of ὙΑἰδης from ἁ-ιδέες and ὙΑπόλλων from ἀπολῶν, and the etymology of ὙΑφροδίτη, explicitly taken from Hesiod. There are various other etymologies that one can more or less assume represent the traditional habit of descriptive etymologizing.

The 'clever' interpreters therefore are doing more; they feel licensed to read more into the text, confident of knowing the poet's true meaning. There are two etymologies in particular that deserve attention in this regard, those of ὙΑθηνᾶ and ὙΕρμῆς; in both cases one can see this 'clever' interpreting of Homer's text being alluded to. Here we are in slightly different territory from philosophers reading their own ideas into a text; rather these are early scholars or philologists reading poetic texts and seeing deeper meanings beneath the surface of the text.

Who are these people? Presumably the sort of people referred to at various times in Plato and Xenophon as using Homer as a compendium of wisdom and ransacking his text for ὑπόνοιαι.⁷⁹ The evidence for the latter has been examined by Richardson recently;⁸⁰ as far as the major Sophists go there is no firm evidence of any allegorizing, though there are hints that Protagoras might have indulged in something of this kind,⁸¹ but the minor figures mentioned in the Xenophon passage offer a mixture of allegory,⁸² interest in ritual and myth, and etymology.⁸³ It seems quite plausible that they could have etymologized in support of allegories like the identification of ὙΑθηνᾶ with νοῦς.

The influence of Homeric scholars is again detectable through independent evidence for the etymology of ὙΕρμῆς at 407e1-408b3. There he is revealed as

⁷⁹ Xenophon, *Symposium* iv 6-7; Plato, *Ion* 537aff; for the reference to ὑπόνοιαι see Xenophon *Symposium* iii 5-6.

⁸⁰ N.J. Richardson, 'Homeric Professors in the Age of the Sophists', in *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* N.S. 21 (1975), 65-81.

⁸¹ In the *Protagoras* 320c2ff he uses a myth to express his ideas (cf Xenophon, *Mem.* II, 1,21ff) and at 316d3-9 he claims that the earlier poets, Homer, Hesiod and Simonides, were all closet Sophists, which might constitute a plea for allegorical interpretation. I shall discuss some major Sophists at length below.

⁸² Particularly Metrodorus of Lampsacus, of whom more anon.

⁸³ Stesimbrotus of Thasus etymologizes Dionysius (fr. 13); Richardson suggests that Anaximander might have given mythological/allegorical interpretations of Pythagorean prescriptions. Burkert has recently suggested that the author of the Derveni Papyrus might have been Stesimbrotus (W. Burkert, 'Der Autor von Derveni: Stesimbrotos Περὶ Τελετῶν', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 62 (1986), pp. 1-5).

an interpreter, a messenger, wily and deceptive in speech and an orator, all functions pertaining to λόγος, which fits the pattern in interpretations of Hermes by scholiasts.⁸⁴ The intervention of Hermes in those cases is seen as the play of human faculties divinized by the poet. Buffière remarks that Athena, Hermes, Ares and Aphrodite in particular were allegorized in this way; it is noticeable that the first three are all given allegorical-style interpretations within a page of the reference to the 'clever' Homeric interpreters.⁸⁵

The assumption that these allegorists used etymologies to support their interpretations of the poets is plausible but ideally one would like more concrete proof. Aid in this respect comes from an unexpected quarter, Democritus. Fragment B2 is an etymology of Τριτογένεια ἢ Ἀθηνᾶ, identifying the goddess with φρόνησις on the grounds that τὸ φρονεῖν is divided into three parts. Here the allegory is backed up by an etymology, an etymology moreover at variance with others 'explaining' the same epithet of the goddess.⁸⁶ It therefore seems reasonable that this etymology was specially formulated to defend this allegory. If so, then the link between etymology and allegory is much more secure, and one can claim that Plato was parodying the attempts of the δεινοί to read allegories into Homer with the support of etymology. I shall discuss Democritus at greater length below.

It seems likely then that the 'clever' interpreters of Homer are minor Sophists and perhaps Democritus, who allegorized and etymologized the poet's text. What evidence we have at least makes plausible the claim that these people are in Plato's sights. Now it is time to look at another group of would-be etymologists, this time of a more philosophical than philological bent, namely οἱ Ἀναξαγόρειοι. Here the realm of physics becomes more important, matching the changing interests of Greek thinkers in the Presocratic era.

⁸⁴ F. Buffière, 'La Notion de "Logos" dans L'Exégèse d'Homère', in *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 54 (1953), 55-60. He points to three different Homeric passages where the figure of Hermes is interpreted in this way. In *Iliad* xxiv 486-7 Priam reminds Achilles of his father, following the advice of Hermes who had led him to the tent of Achilles and advised him on his strategy; a commentator remarks that Hermes represents the force of logos that comforts and strengthens the weak. In *Odyssey* v Hermes tells Calypso that she must let Odysseus go; this is interpreted as the eloquence of Odysseus. Finally, in *Odyssey* x Hermes gives Odysseus a magic herb to protect him against the enchantments of Circe, where Hermes is interpreted as the inner voice of reason and the root that Odysseus is given is interpreted as the reason that calms one down.

⁸⁵ Ἄρης is derived from τὸ ἄρην / τὸ ἀνδρέιον and alternatively ἄρρατον (407c9-d5); these fit in with the identification of Ares with fury and anger that Buffière points to in the allegorists.

⁸⁶ Eg there was a derivation from lake Τριτωνίς in Libya, near which there was a temple to Athena; another etymology derived the epithet from τριτώ, an Aeolic word for head, revealing thereby her birth from Zeus' head.

5.5 *The School of Anaxagoras: οἱ Ἀναξαγόρειοι*

I remarked earlier that many of the targets of the etymological section are the ‘second-leaguers’, the followers of a thinker and doctrine. Such men are often much more fundamentalist in their attitude to the theories in question than the original thinker himself. This can be demonstrated very clearly in the case of the so-called Ἀναξαγόρειοι, and the commentator of the Derveni Papyrus. Metrodorus of Lampsacus was a notorious example of the former; it is reported that he extended Anaxagoras’ claim that Homer was concerned with vice and virtue⁸⁷ to physical concerns.⁸⁸ According to another report he called Agamemnon αἰθήρ, Achilles the sun, Helen the earth, Paris air, Hector the moon etc; Demeter then was the liver, Dionysius the spleen and Apollo the bile.⁸⁹ The whole forms an allegorical representation of Metrodorus’ own scientific theories.⁹⁰ There are no signs of etymology in the very scanty remains of his writings however.

To find that we need to look to Anaxagoras himself. Diogenes reports that he was the first to say that Homer wrote about virtue and vice;⁹¹ nothing supporting this claim survives, but we are told of his etymology of αἰθήρ, which he derived from αἶθειν. Aristotle claimed this etymology led him to misuse the name and identify αἰθήρ with fire,⁹² a good example of using etymology to back up a theory. The *Cratylus* version however is different, deriving it from ἀεὶ θεῖ περὶ τὸν ἀέρα ῥέων, that is, ἀειθεῖρ,⁹³ which is close to the other etymology Aristotle mentions just before the passage mentioned, ἀεὶ θεῖν.

Given the fact that by this time Socrates is stressing the fluxy nature of the etymologies, why does he not give the ‘standard’ version cited by Aristotle? Does he want to make it more outlandish? perhaps he does; but perhaps his aim is rather to point more specifically to a particular flux theory. The inclusion of αῖρ in the etymology then recalls Anaxagoras, fragments B1 and 2; if this is on the right lines, the etymology will have the point of showing that Plato can produce a better etymology for Anaxagoras’ cause than he can himself.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ DK 59 A1 (Diogenes Laertius ii, 11)

⁸⁸ DK 61,2.

⁸⁹ DK 61, 4.

⁹⁰ Richardson, art. cit., p.69.

⁹¹ DK 59 A 1 (= D.L. ii, 11)

⁹² A 73, = *de caelo* A 3, 270 b 24-25.

⁹³ 410b6-8.

⁹⁴ For a brief discussion of the importance of, and relationship between αῖρ and αἰθήρ see KRS pp. 372-374.

Turning to other references to Anaxagoras, we find him mentioned with reference to the revised etymology of ψυχή at 400a9; at 409a7 he is referred to (as are his followers at b6) in the context of the theory that the moon reflects the sun's light; and finally at 413c4-7 the Anaxagorean answer to what it is that 'goes through reality' is νοῦς. The emphasis in both the first and last references is on νοῦς which 'arranged everything';⁹⁵ this is important: if one believes in a cosmic mind organizing things in the universe, the belief that language and reality are closely linked becomes defensible, born of a conviction that language is one of the products of the rationally inspired 'separating-out' of things. This point will be discussed further below in relation to the Derveni Papyrus, but it applies also to Anaxagoras, and the αἰθήρ etymology allows one to speculate that he was not adverse to etymology. Now looking at the first reference, he is said to believe that ψυχή and νοῦς organize and 'contain' (ἐχουσι) the nature of everything;⁹⁶ this leads to the 'ridiculous' etymology φουσέχην.⁹⁷ Elsewhere Socrates is prepared to agree with Anaxagoras up to a point;⁹⁸ yet it is no good trying to back up this plausible theory through etymology, for that leads one into holding a 'ridiculous' derivation like ψυχή-φουσέχην. If however the Anaxagoreans reject this etymology, Anaxagoras' own etymologizing becomes suspect; if they accept it, it would not be hard to produce many more embarrassing derivations to test their faith in etymology. It seems that Plato has neatly boxed the Anaxagoreans into a corner: either they accept the possibility of etymological support for their theories, and run the risk of being ridiculed for such etymologies as ψυχή-φουσέχην, or they reject the aid of etymology altogether.

In the second reference Anaxagoras and his followers are hoist by their own petard once again, as an etymology shows that one of their cherished discoveries was in fact known to the ancients; an unwelcome result of arguing that names contain some wisdom is that sometimes the νομοθέτης will anticipate your own wisdom in a way that takes the lustre off it. A similar joke is played on Heracliteans when Socrates says that flux is as old as Homer at least.⁹⁹

The final reference demonstrates to Anaxagoreans and others that etymology can only get one so far: even if everyone is agreed that δίκαιον is to be derived from διὰ λόγῳ, there is nothing in the etymology itself which especially recommends νοῦς as what 'goes through'; it is an answer that will only

⁹⁵ B12.

⁹⁶ The relationship of ψυχή to νοῦς in Anaxagoras' theory is not terribly clear, as Aristotle himself complains in *de anima* A2,404b1-6, cf 405a13-19 (= DK 59 A100); Anaxagoras regards both as 'movers', 404a25-27 (= A99). In B12 it is said that νοῦς controls all things that have soul, so there is a close relationship between the two. It seems therefore that Plato's statement is a fair interpretation.

⁹⁷ Note Socrates' own comment at 400b6-7.

⁹⁸ *Phaedo* 97c2-3: καὶ ἔδοξε μοι τρόπον τινα εἶναι τὸν νοῦν εἶναι πάντων αἰτίων...

⁹⁹ 402a4-c3.

convince Anaxagoreans.

If the above speculations are correct, there is a very good point to the references to Anaxagoras and his followers: professing a cosmogony that would apparently allow for the development of a natural language, in that mind is the key, they were unsystematic in their application of etymology, stopping at congenial and apparently uncontroversial examples like αἰθήρ-αἰθεῖν. Such selective etymologizing will not do however: either the language is natural or it is not. This Plato demonstrates, leaving the Anaxagoreans in an embarrassing position whichever way they turn. Recall Socrates' complaint in the *Phaedo* that Anaxagoras did not give νοῦς a proper teleological role in the universe;¹⁰⁰ here too it seems Anaxagoras has failed to follow through the consequences of the central position of νοῦς in his system by neglecting to give it a proper explanatory function in language.

Armed with these speculative conclusions let us return to the report of Favorinus, preserved in Diogenes Laertius, that Anaxagoras was the first to 'reveal' that Homer's poems are about virtue and vice.¹⁰¹ Even if true, one should perhaps be cautious; as Pfeiffer remarks, this does not entail Anaxagoras indulging in moral allegory—he could have merely demonstrated its ethical tendency.¹⁰² Yet Metrodorus is said in the same report to have continued the tendency, and we do know of the sorts of allegories he produced; and Anaxagoras is implicated in the fluxy etymology of δίκαιον.

Whether he indulged in moral allegory/etymology or not, perhaps Anaxagoras and his followers are being criticized by Plato for extending their physicalist theories into ethics. Socrates abandoned the study of the natural sciences because they would not give him the answer to the most important questions, what is the good life for man, what is Justice, Piety, etc., whereas Anaxagoras implicitly reduces ethical questions to the physical, the behaviour of νοῦς in the world. The progress of the virtues and vices section of the etymologies, where the virtuous is what is fluxy or the cause of flux, and the vicious is the opposite, is a *reductio ad absurdum* of this attitude.

I turn finally to a quasi-Anaxagorean, Diogenes of Apollonia, as an introduction to the Derveni commentator. A report of Philodemus has it that Diogenes praised Homer for speaking the truth when he said that Zeus knows everything, for Homer, according to Diogenes, thought that Zeus represented air.¹⁰³ Another report has him deriving τὰ ἀφροδίσια from ἀφρός, 'foam', his theory being that the semen of an animal is ἀφρὸν τοῦ αἵματος.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ *Phaedo* 97b8-98c2.

¹⁰¹ DK 59 A1 (= D.L. ii, 11).

¹⁰² Pfeiffer, *A History of Classical Scholarship. From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford, 1968), p.35, note 3.

¹⁰³ DK 64 A 8 (= Philodemus, *de pietate* c.6b).

¹⁰⁴ DK 64 A 24 (= Clem. *Paedag.* i 6, 48)

Fragment B4 justifies his use of ἀήρ as principle by pointing to the fact that animals live by breathing and die without it: ἀήρ is ψυχή and νόησις for them. This recalls Homeric ideas about the ψυχή being one's 'life-breath',¹⁰⁵ tying in with the Philodemus report: Zeus is air because he is the cause of life and air enables us to live. (It is easy to see how this could be supported by an etymology of the Ζεὺς-ζῆν variety.) Diels also suggested linking the etymology of Οὐρανός at *Cratylus* 396b8-c3 to Diogenes' theory that men think with τῷ ἀέρι καθαρόν καὶ ξηρόν.¹⁰⁶ This passage I shall return to later. Now since this mixture of allegory and etymology is just what in my view Plato is parodying, Diogenes makes a plausible target. His relevance is underlined when one remembers that intelligent air is his principle, for what better support could one have for a natural language than this? All Diogenes' vices and more can be seen to the fore in the last but certainly not least member of the Ἀναξαγόρειοι I wish to discuss, the Derveni commentator.

5.6 The Derveni Commentator

In 1962 a papyrus was discovered at Derveni near Thessalonica in northern Greece. It contains an allegorical commentary on an Orphic theogony, written by someone who espoused the physical theories of Anaxagoras and Diogenes of Apollonia.¹⁰⁷ From its style and content, free from any perceptible Platonic or later influences, Burkert argued that it is to be dated to around 400 B.C.;¹⁰⁸ if he is correct then we are given a rare direct glimpse into the world of the Presocratics, unmediated by doxographers or polemical remarks by Plato or Aristotle, offering an opportunity to see at first hand the sorts of attitudes to

¹⁰⁵ See KRS, p.443.

¹⁰⁶ DK 64 A 19 (= Theophrastus *de sens.* 44), note to II, p. 56, line 13.

¹⁰⁷ The definitive text has yet to be published; for the present one can consult Merkelbach's provisional edition published as an appendix (pp.1-12) to *ZPE* 47 (1982). All references are to this text. For comments on the background and significance of the papyrus, see R. Merkelbach, 'Der Orphische Papyrus von Derveni', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 1(1967), 21-32; P. Boyancé, 'Remarques sur le Papyrus de Derveni', *Revue des Etudes Grecques* 87 (1974), 91-110; M.L. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford, 1983) 68-115; J.S. Rusten, 'Interim Notes on the Papyrus from Derveni', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 89 (1985), 121-140; and four articles by W. Burkert, 'Orpheus und die Vorsokratiker: Bemerkungen zum Derveni-Papyrus und zur pythagoreischen Zahlenlehre', *Antike und Abendland* 14 (1968), 93-114; 'La Genèse des Choses et des Mots: le Papyrus de Derveni entre Anaxagore et Cratyle', *Les Etudes Philosophiques* 25 (1970), 443-455; 'Eraclito nel Papiro di Derveni: due nuove Testimonianze', in *Atti del Symposium Heracliteum 1981*, edited by L. Rossetti, 2 volumes (Rome, 1983), i, 37-42; and 'Der Autor von Derveni: Stesimbrotos Περὶ Τελετών?' (cited above, n. 83).

¹⁰⁸ W. Burkert (1970), p.443. In his most recent article Burkert argues that the Derveni Papyrus is not a commentary at all but consists in fact of remnants of Stesimbrotus' 'Περὶ Τελετών'; on that basis he ventures a dating of 420 B.C.

language and reality that, if I am right, Plato is attacking. In addition, the papyrus offers us an even rarer opportunity to study what I will argue is a theory of sorts about the relationship between names and things.

The allegorical interpretation of Homer has been discussed briefly above; why allegorize Orpheus however? The first reason is that 'he'¹⁰⁹ was ranked along with the other great poets: Orpheus, Musaeus, Homer and Hesiod made up the classic canon of Greek poets.¹¹⁰ In allegorizing Orpheus in terms of Anaxagorean and Diogenean theory the commentator was thus following a venerable tradition.

The legends surrounding Orpheus offer some grounds for the belief that his words contained divine wisdom. He was a magical figure with semi-divine powers;¹¹¹ a man who transcended the bounds of mortality and walked amongst the gods;¹¹² and one of the rare beings who supplied the Greeks with elements of their culture.¹¹³ The wisdom of such a man was not for the uninitiated.¹¹⁴ It is not difficult to see why the Derveni commentator should be attracted to such a source to 'reveal' his philosophical views and thereby to gain additional support for them. Undoubtedly he saw nothing amiss in such behaviour: the words of Orpheus contain a hidden truth; Anaxagoras and Diogenes revealed the truth about the nature of the world; therefore, Orpheus reveals the theories of Anaxagoras and Diogenes.

Turning to the text, the atmosphere of a mystery rite, of secrets open only to initiates, is very much present. Thus the fearful Erinyes and the punishments they mete out are referred to in fragment B4ff; in column II,4ff the commentator seems to be describing a ritual act of libation and sacrifice; and in III,8 (if the text is correctly restored) the uninitiated are told to go away. The commentator declares the text of Orpheus' poem to be 'riddling' (αἰνυγματώδης),¹¹⁵ and

¹⁰⁹ The traditions surrounding Orpheus are many: questions as basic as whether there actually was a singer-poet named Orpheus or whether he is completely mythical remain unanswered. For a very good sceptical account of the evidence see I.M. Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus* (Berkeley, 1941).

¹¹⁰ See *Apology* 41a6-7; Hippias, DK 86 B6; for the controversy over the relative dating of the poets see Herodotus ii 53 and Sextus Empiricus *Adv. Math.* i 203.

¹¹¹ We are told he could charm the very trees and animals with his song, proving himself invaluable to the Argonauts on that account when they encountered the Sirens; his patron (or according to some reports, his father) was Apollo, his mother was the Muse Calliope.

¹¹² He descended into the Underworld to rescue his wife Eurydice, an attempt that according to some accounts was a success, but according to others a failure.

¹¹³ In the *Frogs* of Aristophanes he is the man who gave the Greeks their τελεταί and forbade the eating of meat (line 1032); one account hailed him as the inventor of writing (see Kern, fragment 123), another claimed that he devised the names of the gods (Athenag. 18 p.20 Schw., =DK 1 B13, part). In the *Protagoras* 316d8 Protagoras numbers Orpheus and his followers among the ancient σοφισταί, 'educators' in the broadest sense.

¹¹⁴ The Orphics were known for having recourse to books and for claiming that their rites released both the living and the dead from the consequences of their sins (*Republic* 364e3-365a3); they seem to have had the reputation of being somewhat odd (see Barrett on Euripides, *Hippolytus*, lines 952-5).

¹¹⁵ III,4, cf 5.

frequently refers to men's ignorance and lack of understanding of the true nature of the gods.¹¹⁶ He can offer the true 'decodings' of the text, via allegory and etymology.¹¹⁷ In this he is perhaps setting himself up in some way against another Presocratic thinker who believed in the hidden truth contained within λόγος, Heraclitus; there are echoes of the latter in fragment A¹¹⁸ and perhaps in IV 9,¹¹⁹ and the οὐ κατὰ φύσιν in line 8 of A is perhaps expressly dissenting from the opinion of Heraclitus.¹²⁰

How much relevance has all this however to the *Cratylus*? As far as direct references go there is little evidence. Boyancé speculates that the etymology of Δημήτηρ in the *Cratylus*, διδοῦσα ὡς μήτηρ,¹²¹ is reworking an Orphic saying that lies behind XVIII 9-10.¹²² This is more promising; even if Plato were not thinking of the Derveni commentator in particular, he could be parodying other Orphic 'scholars', which is enough for my hypothesis to be vindicated.¹²³

More tempting perhaps is the parallel that some scholars have drawn between the commentator and Euthyphro.¹²⁴ Here as with Socrates under Euthyphronic inspiration we have the inspired investigation of names to yield philosophical theses, theses about the most fundamental matters, in brief, the

¹¹⁶ I, 6, 11; V 2; VIII 3-7; XIV 5-6, 14; XVIII 6; XIX 1-3; and especially XVI, where the commentator pities and wonders at men for their folly in religious matters, wasting their time and money in useless (because ill-directed) devotions. (Though Rusten, art. cit., pp. 138-140, thinks column XVI is an attack on religion in general.)

¹¹⁷ Thus αἰδοῖον is interpreted as the sun via what appears to be a word-play involving αἰδοῖα, 'genitals': men think that the genitals are responsible for procreation, but the commentator knows better — the reverend one responsible for the birth of things is the sun (IX, 4-9); Κρόνος is derived from κρούειν in X, 7; Μοῖρα is equivalent to φρόνησις in XIV, 6-7; in XVII Ἀφροδίτη refers to the mixing together of things, Πειθῶ to their yielding to one another, and Ἀρμονία to their joining together, the latter being supplied with etymologies of a sort, though all three in a sense are the same god (line 7); in XVIII likewise Γῆ, Μήτηρ, Πέα and Ἥρα all refer essentially to the same god(-ess?), but Μήτηρ represents the god's procreative faculty (lines 7-8). Δημήτηρ is a compound of Γῆ plus Μήτηρ, and another etymology comes in lines 12-13: Ἑστία is called Δηιώ because she was ravaged in her copulation (?). Finally, see XIX where Ὠκεανός is air and air is Ζεὺς.

¹¹⁸ Lines 8-10 refer to fragments 3 and 94.

¹¹⁹ The reference would be to fragment 32.

¹²⁰ See Burkert (1983) for some remarks on the relationship between Heraclitus and the commentator.

¹²¹ 404b8-9.

¹²² Boyancé, art. cit., p. 107, note 54.

¹²³ For an alternative view on Δημήτηρ see Goldschmidt, p. 125, who links the *Cratylus* etymology to rationalizing accounts of the gods by Sophists, quoting DK 84 B 5 (= Sextus *adv. math.* ix, 18), where Prodicus is said to have argued that the ancients regarded πάντα τὰ ὠφελούντα τὸν βίον as gods; Δημήτηρ, he claimed, represented bread.

¹²⁴ Boyancé, art. cit., pp. 109-110, imagines the Derveni commentator and Euthyphro to be of the same type; Kahn goes further and suggests that Euthyphro might even have been the author of the Derveni commentary (C.H. Kahn, 'Language and Ontology in the *Cratylus*', in *Exegesis and Argument, Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*, edited by E.N. Lee, A.P.D. Mourelatos and R.M. Rorty, *Phronesis* Supplementary Volume 1 (Assen, 1973), 152-176 (p. 156, n.6)).

nature of the divine. The inspiration of Euthyphro seems to be the only way offered in the *Cratylus* (aside from dwelling in the Underworld with Hades the ‘perfect sophist’) of transcending the limits of human ignorance and knowing the truth about names; the gods know the truth about things and names; we cannot match that knowledge. Now Orpheus himself was semi-divine, transcending the limits of human mortality both in his divine parentage and by his visit the Underworld. As such he knew the secrets of the gods; and so inspired interpretation of his poems is the route to knowledge of the divine. Yet the parallel, though attractive, is far-fetched.¹²⁵

The Derveni papyrus’ relevance to the *Cratylus* lies I believe in a different direction, in what one might call its ‘language theories’. Note in the first instance the commentator’s interest in names that refer to the same thing (we have seen this already with regard to the gods). Thus in VI,3 and VII, 5, two pairs of words are said to mean the same (τὸ αὐτὸ δύνανται), and in VI, 8 φωνεῖν is added to λέγειν and διδάσκειν.¹²⁶ Now in the *Cratylus* the δυνάμεις of names is important: at 393e2-4 it does not matter what letters and syllables we use so long as αὐτοῦ δηλουμένην τὴν δύναμιν ἐντιθῶμεν; and just as the doctor examines the ‘powers’ of drugs, so the man who knows about names looks at their ‘powers’.¹²⁷ Then at 424b10-c3 Socrates uses an analogy with those investigating rhythms; first of all they examine the ‘powers’ of the elements, then those of the syllables, so in the same way we should investigate the δυνάμεις of letters and syllables. The ‘powers’ of names in the *Cratylus* seems to mean ‘what things they reveal’; that the Derveni commentator is of a similar opinion is suggested by VII 6-7: σκέψασθαι δὲ χρὴ ἐφ’ ᾧ κεῖται τὸ ἀρκέσαι καὶ τὸ χρῆσαι.¹²⁸

Looking again at the example in VI, we are told that speaking, saying and teaching mean the same. One cannot say anything (λέγειν) without speaking (φωνεῖν); and one cannot teach without speaking, at least as far as those things that are taught through words are concerned. Thus teaching is considered to be part of speaking.¹²⁹ All three words ‘mean the same’ in some sense or other.

¹²⁵ More plausible is Burkert’s recent claim (1986) that the Derveni Papyrus consists in fact of remnants of Stesimbrotus’ *Περὶ Τελετῶν*, a claim that calls into question the Orphic background that I have assumed. Yet even if one were to accept Burkert’s arguments (which are, necessarily, speculative), the thesis that Plato might have read the Derveni text, or something like it, and be attacking its assumptions in the *Cratylus*, is thereby strengthened—that Stesimbrotus, and presumably his writings were known to Plato is apparent from *Ion* 530d1.

¹²⁶ Cf also the somewhat puzzling discussion in VIII about Ὀλυμπος, χρόνος and οὐρανός.

¹²⁷ 394a5-b6.

¹²⁸ On its own this reminds one of Socrates’ strictures on the need to investigate things not their names, at 439b6-8; the commentator’s methods elsewhere however do not suggest he would agree with Socrates on this point. Quite how the commentator thought χρῆσαι and ἀρκέσαι mean the same is mysterious.

¹²⁹ I am presuming that this is the commentator’s opinion, since it makes sense of his treatment of πανομφεύουσιν.

Therefore there is nothing hindering *πανομφεύουσιν* and teaching being the same. This word is not attested elsewhere, but *πανομφαῖος*, ‘sender of ominous voices’, ‘author of divination’, is; *πανομφεύουσιν* thus probably means something like ‘divining’.

This then amounts to a justification of seeking instruction in the inspired outpourings of the Orphic poems. One teaches through words, thus there is no reason why these particular words should not be full of instruction, especially as they are full of divination. The *Cratylus* tool analogy argument claims that naming is part of speaking/saying, since we say things by using names, and the function of names is said to be a teaching one.¹³⁰ In a sense Socrates would agree that teaching is ‘part of’ saying and speaking. Recall too the distinction implicit in that argument between the piece of speech and its descriptive content: it does not matter if two languages use different sounds so long as they say (λέγειν) the same thing.¹³¹ Orpheus is the wise namegiver, and the commentator is the equivalent of Socrates. The crucial difference lies in that Socrates has outlined a hypothetical prescriptive theory, which may or may not be true of Greek, whereas the commentator is confident that the inspired language of Orpheus’ poems needs only to be treated in the correct manner for the truth about reality to be revealed.

If this line of interpretation is correct, Socrates can be seen as offering a properly worked-out theory as opposed to the commentator’s hasty reasoning. One sees the key elements of the latter’s theory reappearing, but put in their proper context. This seems to me to constitute the best evidence on offer for seeing a connection between the Derveni Papyrus and the *Cratylus*,¹³² and armed with this it is worth pushing this interpretation further. Consider XVIII,1-2 where we are told that Orpheus, knowing the nature of men, named things as finely as he could in the circumstances. This again recalls the νομοθέτης and the διαλεκτικός of the tool analogy, the giver of the names and the user, the man who knows about names. So what kind of namegiver is Orpheus? And what kind of natural theory does the commentator have?

At times Orpheus seems to be naming the gods and other things,¹³³ at others he is said to articulate men’s names correctly, to find the ones that are most ‘fitting’ (προσφέρειν) to express their nominata,¹³⁴ in which case he is sorting

¹³⁰ ὄνομα ἄρα διδασκαλικόν τί ἐστιν ὄργανον καὶ διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας ὥσπερ κερκὶς ὑφάσματος, 388b13-c1.

¹³¹ See Hermogenes’ representation of Cratylus’ theory at 383a4-b2: the correctness of names does not depend on uttering a μόριον φωνῆς; and cf 393d1-4.

¹³² One can of course offer alternative explanations, coincidence, or a common source; if the latter is true however it at least suggests that such views were not uncommon.

¹³³ X,7 κρούοντα τὸν Νοῦν πρὸς ἄλληλ[α] Κρόνον ὀνομάσας, cf X,9; XVIII,1: πᾶ [ντ’ οὔ]ν ὁμοίω[ς ὦ]νόμασεν ὡς κάλλιστα ἤ[δύν]ατο.

¹³⁴ See IX,7-8; XIV 7-9; XV,8-9; cf the reference to τοῖς λεγομέν[ο]ις καὶ νομιζομένοις ῥήμασι at XIX, 8.

out the pre-existing names current amongst men. Two different ideas of naming seem to be at play here. In neither case is Orpheus naming in the everyday sense of using the commonly-accepted name for *x*; rather, naming the gods corresponds to a baptism in a strong sense, creating a new name, *x*, for *y*, whereas choosing the most appropriate pre-existing name fits a weaker sense of naming, where one takes a name *x* from the stock of existing names because *x* is in some way or other a better name for a nominatum *y*. The former makes Orpheus into the first namer of the gods, which is indeed one of the traditions that survive around his name;¹³⁵ the latter makes him into a refashioner of the existing language, to make it as correct as possible, using the resources available.

The picture for the most part fits the less radical notion of naming. Orpheus does his best with the stock of names available to convey the truth, knowing that men, even when they use the right names, do not really know the nomina involved. Thus men talk (correctly) about Fate, but they do not know what Fate is.¹³⁶ Orpheus revises the names men speak, pointing them towards the truth, but still uses the traditional language; thus Zeus is likened to a king because that in human terms conveys his supremacy. The difficulty in using traditional language to teach allegorical truth in this way highlights the need for a commentator to explain his words; an example of this is men's belief that a naming necessarily attends a birth, which the commentator, mindful presumably of Eleatic principles, points out is not so.¹³⁷

Looking back to the *Cratylus* this does not seem to be too distant from the role of the namegiver/dialectician who sets out to improve an existing language. Being a man who knows the truth, he will sometimes introduce new names (baptism in the strong sense), and sometimes use existing names in new ways. So according to this view the Derveni commentator makes Orpheus into a namegiver recognizably like the combination of sage and namegiver hypothesised in the *Cratylus*. Indeed, it is an interesting case-study of an attempt to overcome the problem that I discussed in section 2.4 of how a language can be at once the fulfilment of an ideal and adequate to ordinary needs. Too radical a break from ordinary language would render the result unintelligible to all but a few initiates; Orpheus' appeal for the commentator lies partly perhaps in his using the language of men to convey deep truths. The fact that Orpheus 'needs' a commentator to explain 'his' intentions suggests however that the attempt has failed.

It is also noteworthy that unlike *Cratylus* the commentator accepts that some names are used merely conventionally but are nevertheless names,¹³⁸ and that

¹³⁵ See DK 1 B 13(= Athenag. 18 p.20 Schw.). Contrast Herodotus ii 53 where Homer and Hesiod are said to have fulfilled this rôle; obviously there was some controversy on this point.

¹³⁶ XIV, 3-6.

¹³⁷ See XIII, 4-6, XIV, 10-12.

¹³⁸ Thus ἐκλήθη δὲ Γῆ μὲν νόμος, XVIII, 7-8.

the same thing can have several names.¹³⁹ The commentator thus seems to be coming out well in comparison with Cratylus himself. This is a long way however from saying that his theory matches that of Socrates. The commentator still merely assumes that Orpheus' poetry at least is a text of ideal names, that there is no need here to draw a distinction between the ideal language and the existing names of Greek. This assumption is made easier by his belief that we are dealing with a privileged text, the inspired work of a semi-divine poet. Our language is true, if we but knew it. What however of the alternative readings one can extract from names, either by allegory or etymology? Here one must rely on the combined wisdom of a legendary poet, of the Anaxagoreans and, last but not least, that of the commentator, to rebut alternative interpretations. No examination of things is assumed; either one is a true believer or one rejects the whole basis of the commentator's interpretation.

The interest of the commentary does not end here. In section 2.2 above I remarked that the long-lived idea that Plato is talking about the origin of language in this dialogue has an element of truth in it. Socrates can ignore the origins question because his theory is concerned with a putative ideal language, not any particular existing tongue. Cratylus however believes that Greek as we have it is more or less correct. He does therefore owe the reader an account of how this state of near-blessedness has arisen. This point can then be generalized. If one tries to say that at a certain time a given language matches the prescription for an ideal language, then a historical issue concerning its origins arises: how did this come about? In the *Cratylus* Cratylus offers only a vague allusion to the gods having perhaps posited the first names.¹⁴⁰ The Derveni commentary however, if Burkert is right,¹⁴¹ does offer an explanation for the state of the language.

Burkert claims that the Anaxagorean/Diogenean cosmogony is accompanied by an 'onomatogonie', that is, the διάκρισις of things is matched by a process of naming. This comes out in XVII, where the gradual separation of reality into its present arrangement was matched by a corresponding naming, hence the various names for the same god (air) in XVII: Ἀφροδίτη, Πειθώ and Ἀρμονία are the appropriate names for different stages of the cosmogonical process, as the commentator explains via etymologies. Similarly, Zeus will remain the name of air μέχρι εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ εἶδος τὰ νῦν ἑόντα συνεστάθη, | ἐν ᾧ περ πρόσθεν [ἐ]όντα ἠωρεῖτο.¹⁴² Burkert comments: 'chacun de ces noms a sa place propre et son sens original dans les phases successive de la cosmogonie.'¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Γῆ δὲ καὶ Μήτηρ καὶ Ῥέα καὶ Ἥρη ἡ αὐτή, XVIII, 7, cf XIV, 9, XVII, 5-7.

¹⁴⁰ 438c1-4.

¹⁴¹ Burkert (1970); cf Burkert (1985), pp. 128-129.

¹⁴² XIII, 8-9.

¹⁴³ Burkert (1970), p. 447.

The 'meaning' ('sens') of names has thus existed ever since the separating-out of things, long before any men appeared. Men however are at least in touch with the truth, though they do not know it, at least according to a Diogenean/Anaxagorean view of the world: in everything that lives there is a little piece of cosmic reason, a 'piece of god'.¹⁴⁴ Moreover in Diogenes' system the cosmic reason is Air; the voice being a movement of air will mean that names are presumably a 'movement of reason'. Somehow or other names pre-exist us, and are the gift of the god. As possible parallels to this sort of notion Burkert points to Cratylus' suggestion at 438c1-4 that a superhuman power gave us the first names, and the Chorus' thought in the *Agamemnon* that a mysterious being moving its tongue in line with destiny was instrumental in the naming of Helen.¹⁴⁵ He regards these ideas as part of the background to the strange theses of Cratylus.

This is a natural theory, but importantly different from those of the *Cratylus*. Two questions need distinguishing here: firstly, the origin of names, where the rough alternatives are either that some namegiver, or givers, posited names for things, or that names arise 'naturally' in the world much as trees, stones, animals and men, without the intervention of any namegiver.¹⁴⁶ Secondly, one can argue whether a name is appropriate or not, ie whether it is *κατὰ φύσιν* or not.¹⁴⁷ Only the latter question is at issue in the *Cratylus*, at least as far as Socrates' theory is concerned; if Burkert is right, the former is at issue as well in the Derveni papyrus and the first signs of interest in the origin of language will have to be dated much earlier than the Epicureans.

One can make various objections to Burkert's claim. For instance, how does this theory explain the existence of 'conventional' names like Γῆ? No definite answer is given, but one is suggested by XVIII,1-3, where we are told that Orpheus names as accurately as possible, considering the different natures of different men. Some variant on the familiar story of the decline of Man since the Golden Age, when men lived in harmony with the gods, seems a plausible reply for the commentator to have made should anyone have taxed him with this particular problem.

More serious would be the argument that all this is reading far too much into what is in fact an allegory of the cosmogony, and that it remains quite unclear what the mechanism of this naming is. This is true up to a point; Burkert talks of the 'sens des mots' which Orpheus follows consciously and other men follow unconsciously as having existed since the separating-out of things, but he does

¹⁴⁴ See Anaxagoras B12, Diogenes A 19(= Theophrastus *de sens.* 42).

¹⁴⁵ *Agamemnon* 681ff.

¹⁴⁶ A version of this is the Epicurean theory that names arose initially through men's instinctive reaction to stimuli; see Epicurus, *Ep. Hdt.* 75-76 and Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* V, 1028-1090.

¹⁴⁷ The difference between the two questions is succinctly expressed by J. Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, revised edition (London, 1982), 466-467.

not go much further in giving details. What this might amount to is something like names being predetermined, so that the first person to use, eg, the name Ζεύς was revealing nature's gift. The details are indeed very sketchy, but some further support for Burkert's thesis can perhaps be gathered from XV,1-2, where we are told that each thing is named ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐπικρατοῦντος; this could mean that the name is (at least in the beginning) objectively true because it arises from the objective structure of the thing. It is hard to see when the meaning of the name is fixed other than when the thing takes on its determinate structure.¹⁴⁸ A further objection might be to refer again to X, 7 and 9, where Orpheus himself it seems is naming Κρόνος, yet this can be explained again in terms of Orpheus using an established name which men do use, but in ignorance, and referring it to its correct nominatum, Νοῦς. Orpheus in other words does not give the gods their names; that tradition is a red herring in this case.

Despite the lack of detail, there does seem to be some 'natural' link that the commentator, armed with the theories of Anaxagoras and Diogenes, and inspired by Orpheus, is looking to; the names Orpheus uses are correct, and the commentator gives us a reason for that fact. This supplies just what I have argued the commentator needs, namely, an answer to the question, how did this truth-revealing language arise. Socrates' theory, being prescriptive, can allow for the possibility that the language under examination is a 'good' one or bad; it says nothing about the *de facto* origins of names, just the necessary conditions for a philosophically sound language. The commentator however, believing that the Greek at least of Orpheus' poems is full of true names, needs to explain why this is so. According to the interpretation here offered, he does just that. Under attack from *Cratylus*-type arguments he could always retreat to his faith in Anaxagoreanism and declare that these names at least are true, interpreted in that light. His beliefs might seem somewhat risible, but annoyingly hard to refute.

This might seem to credit the commentator with too much detailed theory concerning language and etymology. For example, the commentator derives Κρόνος from κρούειν,¹⁴⁹ but fails to offer any derivation for the latter. And if we are to accept his theory as at least in some sense self-consistent, we need an explanation. This however is precisely the point: the commentator has not fully understood what is involved in the act of allegorizing and etymologizing a sacred text, just as other Greek thinkers did not; Plato took the relatively confused material available from his predecessors and contemporaries and produced a defensible prescriptive theory. The commentator is a better thinker

¹⁴⁸ Anaxagoras is reported as saying that each thing is given its nature by what is dominant in it, DK 59 A 41 (= Simplicius Phys, 27,2).

¹⁴⁹ X,7.

than he is usually given credit for, in that his allegorical/etymological interpretations are provided with some sort of theoretical foundation, but there are no signs in the text that he went far enough. If one looks at Plato's strategy in these terms, demonstrating just what is involved in approaching language in this way, then the Derveni commentary remains a prime candidate as a target of the *Cratylus*. Furthermore, even if the Derveni commentary itself was not in Plato's mind, its existence points to a tradition of such speculation; if one grants that, my hypothesis concerning the targets of the etymologies receives more support.¹⁵⁰

5.7 οἱ μετεωρολόγοι

The etymological section is littered with references to ill-defined groups of thinkers and poets, as has become apparent. In the next two sections I will try to widen the scope of this survey by focussing on two such groups, the 'astronomers' and the tragedians. οἱ μετεωρολόγοι, like other words indicating dealings with τὰ μετέωρα, is often used in a derogatory sense, and seems to cover a wide range of thinkers. Thus Aristophanes uses the verb μετεωροκοπεῖν, 'to prate about high things', has Socrates claim he has learnt τὰ μετέωρα, describes Prodicus as one of the μετεωροσοφισταὶ and talks of μετεωροφένες.¹⁵¹ Hippocrates contrasts ἰατρική, an established τέχνη which needs no empty postulates, to the study of τὰ ἀφανέα τε καὶ ἀπορεόμενα, περὶ ὧν ἀνάγκη, ἥν τις ἐπιχειρῇ τι λέγειν, ὑποθέσει χρησθαι, οἷον περὶ τῶν μετεώρων ἢ τῶν ὑπὸ γῆν. Such 'sciences' can never give certain knowledge, continues Hippocrates.¹⁵² The same pairing of things above and below is found in the *Apology*, where Socrates talks of the 'unofficial' charge levelled against him over the years, ὡς ἔστιν τις Σωκράτης σοφὸς ἀνὴρ, τά τε μετέωρα φροντιστὴς καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ γῆς πάντα ἀνεξήγητος...¹⁵³ And in the ship similes of both the *Republic* and the *Politicus* the true helmsman is accused by his ignorant crew of being a stargazer and idle chatterer.¹⁵⁴ A μετεωρολόγος is thus in this pejorative sense

¹⁵⁰ Cf Kahn, art. cit., p. 156, note 6: 'Plato's extensive use of etymology as a device for introducing the cosmology of flux, a device which has heretofore seemed rather unnatural, now appears firmly grounded in a literary tradition of the late fifth century, within which the language and thought of the poets is systematically reinterpreted as an anticipation of the "modern" theories of Anaxagoras and other Ionian cosmologists.'

¹⁵¹ *Peace* 92 and *Clouds* 228, 360-1 and 333 respectively.

¹⁵² Hippocrates, *On Ancient Medicine* 1.

¹⁵³ *Apology* 18b6-8.

¹⁵⁴ In the *Republic* he is called a μετεωροσκόπον τε καὶ ἀδολέσχην, and a μετεωρολέσχης, 'stargazer', 488e4-489a1, 489c6, in the *Politicus* μετεωρολόγον, ἀδολέσχην τινὰ σοφιστήν, 299b7-8.

anyone who speculates idly, and it is often accompanied, it seems, by a desire to inflict those speculations on others.

This collocation of stargazing and chattering emerges in the *Cratylus* at 401b7-8, where Socrates says that in his opinion the first namegivers were μετεωρολόγοι καὶ ἀδολέσχαι τινές. Yet why do astronomy and chatter go together? Recall Hippocrates' remarks: it is because they deal with things that cannot be proved, forcing their practioners to introduce all kinds of empty hypotheses. Further evidence on this point comes from an interesting corner, the *Encomium of Helen* of Gorgias. In sections 8-14 Gorgias is talking about the power of words to persuade the soul; in 13 he mentions three different arenas where persuasion operates, the first of which is τοὺς τῶν μετεωρολόγων λόγους, οἵτινες δόξαν ἀντὶ δόξης τὴν μὲν ἀφελόμενοι τὴν δ' ἐνεργασάμενοι τὰ ἄπιστα καὶ ἄδηλα φαίνεσθαι τοῖς τῆς δόξης ὁμμασιν ἐποίησαν. Astronomers and cosmologists arguing about the structure of the universe disagree; the only way they can make their particular theories attractive to the ordinary person is by persuasive rhetoric, the answers being hidden to man.¹⁵⁵

Astronomers and the like have to try to impress people of the truth of their unprovable theories by 'chattering' away to no good effect. Given the unprovable nature of their theories it would not be surprising if they were to resort to tactics like allegory and etymology, as with the Derveni commentator. More is at stake however. Socrates, as has been seen, was accused of being a star-gazer, and presumably a 'chatterer'—this comes out in the figure of the true helmsman in the *Politicus* passage, who as well as being called a 'star-watching, chattering Sophist' is accused of corrupting younger men and persuading them to break the laws concerning helmsmanship and medicine, in a clear reference to the charges against Socrates.¹⁵⁶ If one asked the mythical man in the agora to describe Socrates, he might well have said he was a μετεωρολόγος καὶ ἀδολέσχης. That Plato was well aware of the fact and tried to deflect the charge can be seen for example when Parmenides tells the youthful Socrates to practice dialectic whilst young, though it appears to be useless and is called ἀδολεσχία by the many.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, in the *Phaedrus* Socrates declares that πᾶσαι ὅσαι μεγάλοι τῶν τεχνῶν προσδέονται ἀδολεσχίας καὶ μετεωρολογίας φύσεως πέρι.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ See D.M. MacDowell, *Gorgias, Encomium of Helen*, edited with introduction, notes and translation (Bristol, 1982), ad loc. MacDowell argues that Gorgias is not claiming all scientific theories false, merely that people can be persuaded to believe a particular theory, whether it is true or not. Cf also J.M. Robinson, 'On Gorgias', in *Exegesis and Argument, Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos, Phronesis* supplementary volume 1, edited by E.N. Lee, A.P.D. Mourelatos and R.M. Rorty (Assen, 1973), 49-60, arguing against Guthrie's claim that Gorgias was an extreme relativist.

¹⁵⁶ *Politicus* 299b8-c6.

¹⁵⁷ *Parmenides* 135d3-5.

¹⁵⁸ *Phaedrus* 269e4-270a3.

Thus when Plato talks about οἱ μετεωρολόγοι καὶ ἀδολέσχαι in the *Cratylus* and elsewhere he is consciously using terms that would recall to his readers mocking attacks on Socrates. Yet if this so, Plato has to try to separate those speculative chatterers who deserve censure and those (Socrates among them) who do not. In the case of the ship similes of the *Republic* and *Politicus* it is clear enough: the ignorant crew fail to realise the importance of the stars and other μετέωρα to navigation, just as the Athenians failed to see the point of Socrates and philosophy to the well-being of the state. And in the passages quoted from both the *Phaedrus* and the *Parmenides* Plato's point is that some 'high-talking' is necessary in any important craft to acquire a theoretical knowledge of the nature of the craft's object.

The situation in the *Cratylus* is more complex. It is the original namegivers who are said to be stargazers and chatterers, the reason being apparently that they did not shirk fundamental philosophical issues: a name like Ἑστία can be etymologized either to refer to (Eleatic?) stability or Heraclitean flux.¹⁵⁹ Such theoretical debates are fundamental to philosophy, and it is clear that a proper philosophical language would have to take a stand on such issues. Socrates' implicit criticism thus is not necessarily directed at the first namegivers (for they could well have given the names correctly); what does deserve criticism however is using etymology to try to answer such fundamental questions, instead of proceeding with dialectic and the examination of things.¹⁶⁰ All etymology reveals here is the gulf separating the supporters of stability and flux respectively.

This then offers one way of differentiating good and bad 'astronomy' in the context of the *Cratylus*: bad 'astronomers' are lazy, thinking that dubious etymologies are sufficient to support their speculations, rather than hard thought. One can now seek out possible references to such people. Pythagoreans of one sort or another are one possible target; Boyancé argued that there is a system revealed in the etymologies, which he called the 'doctrine of Euthyphro', and he also called attention to the Pythagorean ἄκουσμα reported in Iamblichus, *de vita pythagorica* 82: τί τὸ σοφώτατον· ἀριθμός· δεύτερον δὲ ὁ τοῖς πράγμασι τὰ ὀνόματα θέμενος. He uses this to claim a mystic etymologizing tradition amongst Pythagoreans. I have rejected the claim that Euthyphro is to be seen behind the etymologies in this way,¹⁶¹ but that does not mean that unnamed mystic Pythagoreans, believing in the purifying powers of contemplating the divine bodies moving in their circular orbits, and being keen

¹⁵⁹ For this 'twofold and contradictory interpretation' of the name, cf J.P. Vernant, 'Hestia-Hermes: the Religious Expression of Space and Movement in Ancient Greece', in his *Myth and Thought among the Greeks* (London, 1983; translation of 1965 original), pp. 127-175, esp. p. 161.

¹⁶⁰ 439b4-8.

¹⁶¹ See section 5.1 above.

on etymology, might not figure amongst οἱ μετεωρολόγοι.¹⁶² Thus when at 396c1-3 Socrates says in the course of explicating his etymology of Οὐρανός that these mysterious people say that gazing upwards results in a καθαρὸς νοῦς, Boyancé sees them as Pythagorean mystics who believe that purification is linked to observation of the heavens.¹⁶³

This is plausible, but another possibility is that Anaxagoras and Diogenes, in whose thought the purity of Mind is a fundamental feature, are being alluded to yet again.¹⁶⁴ Given the frequency of references elsewhere to the Anaxagoreans this possibility seems not unlikely. Boyancé debates whether to read ὅθεν in c1 in a local sense, 'from on high comes pure νοῦς', or with a logical sense, 'as a result of which'; the former would seem to favour more an Anaxagorean reading, the latter the mystic Pythagorean one.

Alternatively one does not have to make a choice: one could see Plato as lumping a whole range of natural scientists together with more mystic types. The Derveni Papyrus has demonstrated the bizarre mixture of physics, ritual and theology that some of the Anaxagorean 'school' professed, and so this would not be surprising. To decide quite where the truth lies seems impossible, and it is not unlikely that Plato was happy that that should be so, demonstrating that one cannot draw a firm line between the vagaries of mystics and the erroneous theories of 'serious' philosophers. 'Stargazers' takes in a variety of thinkers, as has already emerged; this fact makes the task of sorting out whom exactly Plato has in mind nearly impossible, but it also reinforces the impression that he regards a whole range of Greek thinkers as fair game here.

At 404c2 however one can be more definite that when the namegiver is said perhaps to have been μετεωρολογῶν when he derived Ἥρα from ἄηρ, we are supposed to be put in mind of Empedocles, as I have discussed above. Empedocles, with his mixture of mystic religion and natural philosophy is an ideal candidate to be a μετεωρολόγος. A similar sort of mixture seems to be evident in the etymologies suggested for Ἀπόλλων, supporting Boyancé's suggestion that a 'mystic Pythagoreanism' lies behind them. This makes οἱ κομψοὶ περὶ μουσικῆν καὶ ἀστρονομίαν with the reference following to the harmony of the spheres, a likely description of these mystics.¹⁶⁵ Pythagorean influence can also plausibly be discerned in several other etymologies. Those of σῶμα have been discussed in 4.3 b) above, whilst the etymologies of

¹⁶² P. Boyancé, 'La <<Doctrine d'Euthyphron>> dans le *Cratyle*', *Revue Etudes Grecques* 54 (1941), 141-175. For possible Pythagorean etymologizing see my comments at 4.3 b) above.

¹⁶³ Art. cit., pp. 156-158. He admits that it is a very difficult passage to explain satisfactorily.

¹⁶⁴ The purity of Mind is referred to in the *Cratylus* itself at 413c5-7; cf Aristotle, *de anima* A 2, 405a15-17 (= DK 59 A 55); Plutarch, *Pericles* 4 (= A 15); B 12: [νοῦς] ἔστι γὰρ λεπτότατον τε πάντων χρημάτων καὶ καθαρώτατον' DK 64 A 19 (= Theophrastus *de sensu* 44) φρονεῖν δ' ... τῷ ἀέρι καθαρῷ καὶ ξηρῷ: Cf Diels, note to line 13 on volume 2, p. 56.

¹⁶⁵ 405d2.

Ἄιδης and δαίμων recall the eschatology of the *Phaedo*;¹⁶⁶ Sambursky points to Pythagorean ideas in the etymologies of ἐκούσιον and ἀνάγκη,¹⁶⁷ where ignorance is linked to compulsion: one of Aristoxenos' Pythagorean sayings claims that in the μάθησις of any ἐπιστήμη or τέχνη, τὰς μὲν ἐκουσίους ὀρθὰς τε εἶναι καὶ εἰς τέλος ἀφικνεῖσθαι, τὰς δὲ ἀκουσίους φαύλους τε καὶ ἀτελεῖς εἶναι.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, two etymologies recall to mind the quasi-Pythagorean Alcmaeon. He believed that the eternal motion of the heavenly bodies was proof of their divinity, a theory that fits the etymology of θεοί from θεῖν at 397c8-d6.¹⁶⁹ Likewise the etymology of ἄνθρωπος from ἀνθρώων ἃ ὅπωπε recalls his theory that men differ from animals in possessing understanding as well as perception.¹⁷⁰ Elsewhere in Plato's dialogues there are clear references to Alcmaeon's theories;¹⁷¹ what we lack however is any indication that he was an etymologist.

This lack of anything much more than suggestive hints that the Pythagoreans used etymology is a problem for my thesis. The evidence for Philolaus is more helpful, in that he seems to support his belief that φλέγμα is, contrary to most people's opinions, hot, by deriving it from φλέγειν.¹⁷² This might not represent his own words however. It was also said that δι' αἰνιγμάτων ἐδίδασκε καθάπερ ἦν ἔθος αὐτοῖς,¹⁷³ thus it is plausible that he, or other Pythagoreans, used etymology to support other theories too.

Two points emerge from this discussion. One is that Plato is inviting comparison with Socrates when he refers to μετεωρολόγοι, and so he needs to hint at least at some distinction between good and bad 'astronomers'. This he does, I argue, in rejecting any decision on such issues as flux versus stability, issues that a metaphysician (an acceptable translation for μετεωρολόγος in some contexts) must consider, on the basis of the study of names rather than dialectic. Not dissimilarly, I have argued that Cratylus is presented in a way that echoes popular images of Socrates;¹⁷⁴ it is then up to the reader to see how the two are to be distinguished.

¹⁶⁶ See 4.3 d) above.

¹⁶⁷ 420d3-e3.

¹⁶⁸ DK 58 D 5 ad fin (= Stobaeus, *Eclogae* ii 119); S. Sambursky, 'A Democritean Metaphor in Plato's *Cratylus*', *Phronesis* 4 (1959), 1-4.

¹⁶⁹ Aristotle, *de anima* A 2, 405a29-405b1 (= DK 24 A 12).

¹⁷⁰ See DK 24 B 1a (= Theophrastus *de sens.* 25); Goldschmidt, op. cit., pp. 114-5.

¹⁷¹ Most famously in *Phaedrus* 245c5ff where Plato adapts Alcmaeon's theory that the soul is immortal *qua* eternally self-moving; cf *Phaedo* 96b5-8, where Alcmaeon's theory about the brain being the centre of cognition is mentioned. For a good account see Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy*, 6 volumes (Cambridge, 1962-1981) i, pp. 341-359. He comments: 'It is difficult not to believe that Plato was deeply influenced by Alcmaeon.' (p. 354).

¹⁷² DK 44 A 27.

¹⁷³ Scholiast to Plato, *Phaedo* 61e (= DK 44 A 1a).

¹⁷⁴ See 1.1 above, and cf Socrates' apparent approval of Cratylus' theory at 390d9-e4.

Secondly, as far as the bad 'astronomers' are concerned, one can dimly discern the tracks of a number of different thinkers, few of whom one can pin down precisely, who were, if my thesis is correct, opportunist etymologists. One is tempted to agree with Boyancé that a mystic Pythagoreanism existed which indulged in etymology, and hypothesise that the combination of celestial speculation and linguistic fancy was particularly common amongst those I have called the 'second-leaguers', the less able but rather over-enthusiastic followers of greater minds. Here one has to rest with speculation. It is time to cast the net of this investigation still further, to include the tragedians.

5.8 οἱ τραγωδοποιοί

The tragedians merit attention for two reasons. Firstly because the tragedies, like the Homeric epics, contain many etymologies of proper names; and, secondly, because Socrates refers directly and, arguably, indirectly, to tragedians in the dialogue. I shall focus on Aeschylus in the following brief discussion.¹⁷⁵

A brief look at some of the more vivid examples of etymology in Aeschylus' plays confirms that he used etymology to great effect. Thus in the *Persians* 206 Φοῖβος is juxtaposed to φόβος, pointing to the etymology; similarly, Cassandra in the throes of despair in the *Agamemnon* bewails her destruction at the hands of Apollo: ὥπολλον ὥπολλον, ἄγυιᾶτ', ἀπόλλων ἐμός· ἀπώλεσας γὰρ οὐ μόλις τὸ δεύτερον (1080-82); earlier the Chorus derive the hateful name of 'Helen' from ἐλένας, ἑλάνδρος, ἐλέπτολις (689-690), and lament the κῆδος ὀρθώνυμον that has come to Troy, κῆδος meaning 'marriage-bond' and 'grief'.¹⁷⁶ The name of 'Zeus' is also etymologized: φυσιζόου γένος τόδε Ζηνός ἐστιν ἀληθῶς (*Suppliants* 584-5),¹⁷⁷ and ἰὼ ἰή, διὰ Διὸς παναιτίου πανεργέτα (*Agamemnon* 1485-86). Another similar etymology is that of Δίκη from Διὸς κόρα at *Choephoroe* 948-951.

¹⁷⁵ For a (complete?) list of etymologies in Aeschylus see W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechische Literatur* Part I, volume 2 (Münich, 1934) p. 297f, n. 3. Discussions of etymologies in the *Oresteia* can be found in S.D. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: the Oresteia* (Cambridge, 1984); see index under 'etymology'. Aeschylus is not alone however in his interest in etymology; note the varied plays on the name Οἰδίπους in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*: it primarily means 'swollen-footed', but one can also etymologize it as οἱ δίπους (alas, two-footed one), or οἶδ' ὁδούς (I know the roads), etc.

¹⁷⁶ 699ff. This is rather similar in tone to Heraclitus, fragment B 48: βίος· τῷ σὺν τόξῳ ὄνομα βίος, ἔργον δὲ θάνατος. For the comparison between Aeschylus and Heraclitus see C.H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 7, 90-92, 201, and 270.

¹⁷⁷ It has to be admitted that φυσιζόου is an emendation by Schütz; M reads φυσίζοον. Aside from the the question of sense, the former is preferable on the grounds that it gives a better balanced sentence.

Turning to the *Cratylus*, two of the above etymologies can be paralleled to a greater or lesser extent, the derivation of Apollo's name by Cassandra and the etymology of Zeus. Thus at 404c5ff we are told of an etymology of Ἀπόλλων that the many accept through their ignorance of the correctness of names, but which Socrates rejects, clearly the Ἀπόλλων/Ἀπόλλυμι etymology. A plausible inference that one could draw from this is that Plato calls into question the traditional picture of Apollo that emerges from myth and tragedy, and by implication attacks any claims the poets might make to knowledge of the correctness of names. They communicate to the many a false picture of the gods. Here one can compare Plato's strictures in the *Republic* on the allegorical interpretation of the traditional stories of the gods: it is wrong and educationally damaging that the gods should be represented as quarrelling, wronging each other and so forth.¹⁷⁸

The etymologies of Ζεύς can be compared to δι' ὃν ζῆν ἅει πᾶσι τοῖς ζῶσιν ὑπάρχει.¹⁷⁹ Here too there is the emphasis on the god as the bringer of life, as the cause of everything. Yet etymologies of Ζεύς are very common in Greek literature, so why should tragedians, specifically Aeschylus, be in Plato's mind? There is a two-fold answer to this. Firstly, there are clear references to the tragedians and their practices, holding them up for criticism, thereby demonstrating that Plato considered them as self-appointed 'experts' on the correctness of names whose claims to knowledge were false; and secondly, the whole question of the relationship between language and the world, more specifically that between names and their bearers, was one that Aeschylus took seriously and held up to scrutiny in the *Oresteia*.

Firstly, Plato's references in the text. At 425d5-8 Socrates warns against behaving like the tragedians do, bringing in a *deus ex machina*, and thereby avoiding difficulties by assuming that the πρῶτα ὀνόματα have an unknowable divine origin. The tragedians draw inferences from names but they cannot in the final analysis justify them. They are not really in touch with the truth about names and their bearers, a point Plato makes in the *Republic* in a different way.¹⁸⁰

Earlier, in his interpretation of Πάν (408b8-d5) Socrates goes out of his way to stress the two-fold nature of the god, contrasting the smooth, divine part above that consorts with the gods and represents truth, to the hairy, goatlike

¹⁷⁸ See section 5.2 above.

¹⁷⁹ *Cratylus* 396a2-b3.

¹⁸⁰ *Republic* X, 597e6-8, where the tragedian (τραγωδοποιός again) is said to be at two removes from reality, like other imitators. In the preceding passage it is the god who makes the Forms; Halliwell (F.S. Halliwell, *Plato: Republic 10 with translation and commentary* (Warminster, 1988), p.114) remarks that 'the reference to god cannot be taken entirely seriously: we should compare the explicit humour of *Crat.* 425d.' Plato is seeking a rhetorical emphasis of how far removed from the truth is the work of artist. Even if one assumes that the (true) πρῶτα ὀνόματα are divinely created, the fact remains, the tragedians cannot penetrate to the heart of that mystery.

lower part, dwelling amongst the many and representing falsity. He continues: ἐνταῦθα γὰρ πλείστοι οἱ μῦθοί τε καὶ τὰ ψεύδη ἐστίν, περὶ τὸν τραγικὸν βίον. Clearly τραγικός means ‘tragic’ here, with the emphasis on μῦθοι, λόγος and the reference to οἱ πολλοί, recalling 404c5-7 and d8-e2, where the many are taken to task for adopting the wrong view about Apollo. A similar point to the *Republic* passage is being made: the pretensions of tragedians to speak the truth about the divine are ridiculous, for they dwell amidst falsity. To add insult to injury, the point is made by means of a common tool of tragedy, namely, etymology.

Finally, in 414c4-7 Socrates talks about people burying the first names¹⁸¹ in obscurity by adding or taking away letters for euphony’s sake; they are said to have wanted to τραγωδεῖν those first names. Implicitly, the tragedians are more concerned with the sound of names than their meanings. Again, they cannot be relied upon.

Secondly, consideration of the views of Aeschylus on the relationship between names and things reveal concerns that are similar to Plato’s. Aeschylus stresses the gap between men and gods in all things, especially in the understanding of the meaning of words and other signs, understanding that could bring knowledge of the future, could men but acquire it. Thus the namer of Helen who has done the job so well is one whom we do not see sing the Chorus—in other words, a god. Only a god could have named her so fittingly, she who is ἐλένας ἐλάνδρος ἐλέπτολις; alas the truth of her name comes to men too late. Indeed knowledge of the purport of names always comes too late; Cassandra speaks the truth but no-one believes her. At the root of all things is Zeus, the fundamental belief expressed by the Hymn to Zeus,¹⁸² and the etymology of his name from διαί.¹⁸³ Yet men are still unsure about his name, despite the apparent ‘natural’ relation between Ζεύς-Διά and ζῆν-διά, revealing his essence as being the cause of everything and the bringer of life; the Chorus still address him with the traditional formula to ward off any suspicion of hubris.¹⁸⁴

The belief that names are somehow divine, and do in a mysterious way reveal the essence of things, is here combined with a tragic representation of men’s inability to penetrate that mystery until after the (fatal) event. Similarly, the various etymologies of Oedipus’ name that emerge during the course of *Oedipus Rex* are meaningless until the full significance of events earlier in Oedipus’ life becomes clear. The practice of etymology, like other means of trying to bridge the gap between signs and their meanings, can never (at least

¹⁸¹ πρῶτα ὀνόματα is the phrase used; here it presumably has an exclusively temporal meaning, in contrast to the πρῶτα ὀνόματα of 421-7.

¹⁸² *Agamemnon* 160-183.

¹⁸³ *Agamemnon* 1485-6.

¹⁸⁴ Ζεὺς ὅστις ποτ’ ἐστίν, εἰ τόδ’ αὐτῷ φίλον κεκλημένῳ, τοῦτό νιν προσεννέπω *Agamemnon* 160-2.

for the majority of mankind) lead to greater insight and knowledge, though it can bring some comfort.

This depressing conclusion is close to Plato's in some respects in that it exposes the foolishness of seeking knowledge through names. Just as the gap between gods and men is stressed in the *Cratylus*, and the possibility of transcending the divide, whether it be put in terms of gods and men or the world of Flux and that of Forms, is put in question, so too in tragedy the feebleness of men's knowledge is laid out before us in a stark and unsettling manner. Plato could still complain however that tragedy left too many false myths standing. Instead of a philosophical investigation of the divine, it relied on retelling the bad old stories; and it left the possibility of the acquisition of knowledge through divination and prophecy. Names still possess 'magic' powers, and language is thus in some sense 'correct'; there is simply a tragic lack of human insight into the nature of things. The insight of a Cassandra is hardly his model for a scientific knowledge of names. And this fascination with 'name-magic' is enough to have brought the tragedians under Plato's suspicion.

5.9 The Sophists

Thus far this schematic 'history' has concentrated on the divine and 'physics' sections of the etymologies rather than the names of the intellectual virtues and vices, but with the Sophists this changes, reflecting their concentration on man and society. Firstly, I shall look at two Sophists who are referred to by name, Protagoras and Prodicus.¹⁸⁵ The references to them in the first part of the dialogue as being (expensive) teachers of the correctness of names, for all the irony, at least suggests that they had rival views of ἡ ὀρθότης ὀνομάτων.

a) Protagoras and Ὀρθόεπεια

Protagoras claimed to teach what he called ὀρθόεπεια, in which, judging by some remarks made by Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, he discussed the art of making

¹⁸⁵ Protagoras' 'Man is the Measure' doctrine is introduced and rather speedily dispatched at 385e4-386d2 (contrast the elaborate refutation of the *Theaetetus*), and he is presented as a teacher of the correctness of names at 391c2-4; Socrates laments that he has not heard Prodicus' 50 drachmai lecture (course of lectures?), but only the one drachma one at 384b2-c1; cf, eg, *Charmides* 163d3-4: καὶ γὰρ Προδίκου μυρία τινὰ ἀκήκοα περὶ ὀνομάτων διαοῦντος; *Euthydemus* 277e3-4: πρῶτον γάρ, ὡς φησι Πρόδικος, περὶ ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητος μαθεῖν δεῖ.

the right speech for the right occasion.¹⁸⁶ Amongst his other accomplishments he was apparently the first to distinguish tenses of the verb, to expound the principle of the right moment, to conduct debates and to introduce disputants to argumentative tricks; he neglected meanings (τὴν διάνοιαν ἀφείς) and concentrated on words; he was the first to adopt the denial of the possibility of contradiction in discussions, and he divided speech into four parts, entreaty, question, answer and command (other reports add narration, report and invitation).¹⁸⁷ Aristotle reports that he introduced distinctions of gender,¹⁸⁸ and that he discussed solecisms.¹⁸⁹ And in the *Protagoras* Plato has him declare that the greatest part of education is to be skilled in understanding poetry; there follows the interpretation of the poem of Simonides.¹⁹⁰

This list presents Protagoras as being interested for the most part in literary criticism and primitive 'linguistics'; ὀρθόπεια does seem to mean the art of appropriate speaking. As far as any etymology or allegory goes there is no trace, and it is hard to discern any philosophical theory here, besides the sophistic denial of contradiction. This is the view that Fehling for example takes, pointing out that Protagoras' distinctions of speech and gender are in the context of Homeric criticism; Protagoras is concerned with poetic analysis.¹⁹¹ Kerferd was unhappy about limiting Protagoras' interests in this way, arguing that he was not merely describing established usage but also prescribing the correct forms;¹⁹² the problem is that the only surviving examples of his prescriptions are in the context of epic vocabulary, unless one admits as evidence for his practice Aristophanes, *Clouds* 658ff (= DK 80 C 3), where Socrates tells Strepsiades how the names of certain animals should be altered to represent their gender.

If so, what criteria did Protagoras use to decide that μῆνις and πῆληξ were truly masculine words? Both may be thought of as naturally masculine words, or perhaps morphological considerations play a part; Kerferd notes that both these considerations are present in the Aristophanes passage. If one could be sure about the import of the mysterious phrase τὴν διάνοιαν ἀφείς, then Protagoras' methods and aims would presumably become clearer. The word διάνοια has several relevant meanings listed in the lexicon, 'thought' in the

¹⁸⁶ DK 80 A 26 (= Plato, *Phaedrus* 267c6). The context is a discussion of the chief characteristics of various contemporary orators; Socrates has just mentioned Polus and Licymnius and their many different and ornate styles of speaking, at which Phaedrus asks him whether Protagoras did not write something of a similar sort; yes, says Socrates, his ὀρθόπεια.

¹⁸⁷ Diogenes Laertius ix 52-4 (=DK 80 A 1).

¹⁸⁸ *Rhetoric* iii 5, 1407b6 (=DK 80 A 27).

¹⁸⁹ *Sophist. El.* xiv, 173b17 (=DK 80 A 28).

¹⁹⁰ 338e6-339a3.

¹⁹¹ D. Fehling, 'Zwei Untersuchungen zur griechischen Sprachphilosophie', in *Rh. Mus.* 108 (1965), 212-229 (pp. 212-217). He argues that Protagoras' corrections of Homer in A 28 and 29 are in accord with *Protagoras* 338eff, where Protagoras is attempting to 'correct' another great poet.

¹⁹² G.B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 68-69

sense of intention, a thought or notion, and the meaning of a word or passage; perhaps it means ignoring the meaning of the word to concentrate on the word itself, but this seems implausible. Classen suggested that it means ignoring the context to concentrate on words individually, thereby demonstrating the importance of context for the correct understanding of a particular word, which seems nearer the mark.¹⁹³ For if one looks at the immediate context in Diogenes Laertius, he is listing Protagoras' achievements in the field of eristic,¹⁹⁴ and a mark of eristic debate is that distinctions of meaning according to context and so on, which are necessary to avoid fallacy, are ignored. Thus in the *Euthydemus* Socrates finds it necessary to make distinctions in the meaning of *μανθάνειν* to meet the fallacious arguments of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.¹⁹⁵ Whether Protagoras did this in order to demonstrate the inadequacy of such an approach, or just to win arguments, is another matter.

The precise meaning of *διάνοια* takes on greater importance when one turns to the *Cratylus* and sees that it crops up several times there. At 418c8-9 it means 'intention': *Οἷσθα σὺν ὅτι μόνον τούτων δηλοῖ τὸ ἀρχαῖον ὄνομα τὴν διάνοιαν τοῦ θεμένου*; Given that the intention of the namegiver does, *ex hypothesi*, reflect the truth, any move away from that original intention automatically leads one into falsity. Likewise a little earlier Socrates remarks on how the adding and taking away of letters changes *τὰς τῶν ὀνομάτων διανοίας* (*διάνοια* here means 'meaning').¹⁹⁶ The implication is that, contra Protagoras, the *διάνοια* of a name is of the utmost importance.

A similar moral may also lie behind the etymology of *καλόν*. This derivation is on the face of it a very strange etymology even by the standards of the *Cratylus*. Socrates derives it from *καλοῦν*, explaining this by saying that the thing that 'calls' something a name is that which lays down names, namely *διάνοια* now anything that *νοῦς τε καὶ διάνοια* bring about is *καλόν*; and just as *τὸ ἰατρικὸν ἰατρικὰ ἐργάζεται καὶ τὸ τεκτονικὸν τεκτονικά*, so *τὸ καλοῦν* produces *καλά*. Since *τὸ καλοῦν* has been agreed to be *διάνοια*, so *διάνοια* is rightly regarded as one of the *καλά*.¹⁹⁷ This highly ironic interpretation¹⁹⁸ becomes much more to the point if one sees it as part of an attack on Protagoras: far from being able to ignore *διάνοια* in examining

¹⁹³ C.J. Classen, 'The Study of Language Amongst Socrates' Contemporaries', reprinted in *Sophistik*, edited by C.J. Classen, *Wege der Forschung* Bd. 187 (Darmstadt, 1976), 215-247.

¹⁹⁴ ...καὶ λόγων ἀγῶνας ἐποίησατο καὶ σοφίσματα τοῖς πραγματολογοῦσι προσήγαγε· καὶ τὴν διάνοιαν ἀφείς πρὸς τοῦτομα διελέχθη καὶ τὸ νῦν ἐπιπόλαιον γένος τῶν ἐριστικῶν ἐγέννησεν· (D.L. ix 52).

¹⁹⁵ 277e3-278c1.

¹⁹⁶ 418a7.

¹⁹⁷ 416b6-d11.

¹⁹⁸ The passage is almost a parody of a Socratic argument; note especially d1-4 where Socrates draws an analogy between doctoring, building and naming, recalling one of his 'craft analogy' arguments.

names, the true student of the correctness of names will see its presence in terms of the intellect that does the naming, the intention of the namer, and the (true) meaning of the name; the latter two indeed are identical. Only thus can a scientific knowledge of the names of a language be possible.

From what evidence we have, ὀρθοέπεια and ἡ ὀρθότης ὀνομάτων is a superficial matter for Protagoras, a matter of saying the right thing in the right way, and a modest attempt at rationalizing the vocabulary of the language. If this is so, what Protagoras and Plato mean by the correctness of names is very different. The latter has redefined the meaning of the correctness of names, removing it from the sphere of linguistic modifications and rhetoric and putting it firmly in the centre of a philosophical investigation: if the Greek language, say, is really a correct one, as the behaviour of so many Greeks suggests that they think it is, then that is something to be subjected to rigorous scrutiny, scrutiny that no-one before Plato had thought necessary.

It remains to be seen how far this picture is repeated with Prodicus. Two further points where Plato is gently poking fun at Protagoras deserve a mention. Firstly, at 391c5-7 Hermogenes declares that he rejects Protagoras' 'Truth' completely and so will not accept any of his teaching on the correctness of names. The expression he uses is τὰ δὲ τῇ τοιαύτῃ ἀληθείᾳ ῥηθέντα, recalling the title of Protagoras' book, ἡ Ἀλήθεια, and implying a relativist theory of the correctness of names. This would then be in line with the epistemological and ontological doctrines of the 'Truth'. I suggest that Plato is hinting here that Protagoras is inconsistent: far from having a relativist theory of the correctness of names, he is fond, as we have seen, of laying down the law even for the greatest of poets. Just as Hermogenes was unsure of extending his relativist theory of naming to embrace a Protagorean relativist ontology, so Protagoras was not keen to extend his radical relativism to other aspects of his thought. Protagoras claims to teach the correctness of names, but if he is consistent all he can really claim is to teach the correctness of names (for Protagoras)—and who wants to pay good money to hear that? This then explains Hermogenes' remark that having dismissed the 'Truth' he would not think anything said according to that philosophy to be worth attention. Thus if Protagoras wants to say anything worth hearing about the correctness of names, he needs to change his relativist theories. He cannot pick and choose when to adopt a relativist viewpoint and when to lay down the (objective) law.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Mansfeld ('Protagoras on Epistemological Obstacles and Persons', in *The Sophists and their Legacy*, edited by G.B. Kerferd, *Hermes Einzelschriften*, Heft 44 (Wiesbaden, 1981), pp. 38-53) has argued plausibly that Protagoras was not claiming that Homer's usage was absolutely false, but that it was inconsistent; and a 'consistency theory of truth and a relativist theory of truth are perfectly compatible' (p. 51). If so, the implicit criticism of Protagoras that I have suggested is unfair. Yet this in itself is unsurprising; and once Hermogenes has rejected relativism, however sophisticated, he is right to reject Protagoras' views.

Secondly, we find Ὀρθοέπεια linked with Homer in the title of one of Democritus' books, Περὶ Ὀμήρου ἢ Ὀρθοεπείης καὶ γλωσσέων.²⁰⁰ This suggests that the study of ὀρθοέπεια had a longer history; Guthrie points out that Homer is introduced by Socrates at 391c8ff as one who can teach us about the correctness of names, with his practice of mentioning two names for someone or something, one used by gods, the other by men.²⁰¹ Immediately after the rejection of Protagoras as our guide this mocks his arrogant attempts to correct the greatest of all poets; it also reinforces the point that Plato is redefining the meaning of ὀρθοέπεια, showing that it is not just the investigation of, for example, γλῶσσαι. It is time to turn to Prodicus, to see how far the same results hold of him.

b) *Prodicus and ἡ ὀρθότης ὀνομάτων*

Prodicus seems by far the likeliest person to have developed a theory of naming explicating the relationship between names and the their nominata, given the testimony we have of his attempts to pin down the precise meanings of words and the subtle differences between apparent synonyms.²⁰² What few examples of his verbal distinctions survive are almost all in Platonic dialogues, whose reliability is questionable,²⁰³ what seems clear is that he most typically took two words whose meanings were commonly regarded as more or less interchangeable and made distinctions between them (see the four pairs distinguished in *Protagoras* 337a-c). The major exception to this rule is the distinction preserved in Aristotle between three words for forms of pleasure, χαρά, τέρψις and εὐφροσύνη; he remarks that Prodicus did this because he thought that different names meant different nominata, when in fact all three names were names of the same thing, pleasure.²⁰⁴

If Aristotle is being fair to Prodicus,²⁰⁵ then the latter might have held that

²⁰⁰ D.L. ix 48 (= DK 68 A 33).

²⁰¹ *History of Greek Philosophy*, 6 volumes (Cambridge, 1962-1981), iii, p. 206.

²⁰² Prodicus' studies are variously described, eg as τὴν ἐπὶ τοῖς ὀνόμασιν ἀκριβολογίαν (Marcellinus, *Life of Thucydides*, 36, = DK 84 A 9); τὴν ἀλήθειαν περὶ ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητος (*Cratylus* 384b6, = A 11, cf *Euthydemus* 277e3-4, = A 16); τὸ διαίρειν τὰ ὀνόματα (*Protagoras* 340a7-b2, = DK A 14; cf *Laches* 197d1-5, = DK A 17, *Charmides* 163d3-4, = DK A 18); Alexander reports that Πρόδικος ἐπειρώτο ἐκάστῳ τῶν ὀνομάτων τούτων ἰδιὸν τι σημαινόμενον ὑποτάσσειν. He adds that νομοθετούντων δὲ ἐστὶ τοῦτο, ἀλλ' οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς λεγόντων (= A 19).

²⁰³ The most extended demonstration of the Prodician method in Plato is in the *Protagoras* 337a1-c4; cf 340a7-341e7.

²⁰⁴ *Top.* B6, 112b22, = A 19. The fact that Plato at *Protagoras* 358a6-b2 mentions a distinction that Prodicus made, employing the adjectives *τερπνόν*, *χαρτόν* and *ἡδύ*, suggests that this is indeed a distinction that Prodicus himself made.

²⁰⁵ Note that Aristotle puts his criticism in his own technical terms, declaring these different names

each name in the language signified a distinct thing, thus in truth there were no synonyms.²⁰⁶ From this one can develop a Cratylan-style theory about the natural 'fit' between language and reality and the impossibility of contradiction: each thing has its own name, so that a one-to-one, name to thing relation exists between language and the world; to use the wrong name of something is not to misname it but either to name something else or simply to utter a noise. Hence there can be no contradiction or false-speech.²⁰⁷

Some support for this can be found in the attribution to Prodicus in a late source, Didymus the blind, of the belief in the impossibility of contradiction.²⁰⁸ The slogan οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν is particularly associated with Antisthenes,²⁰⁹ but in the *Euthydemus* we find Socrates claiming that οἱ ἀμφὶ Πρωταγόραν σφόδρα ἐχρῶντο αὐτῷ [sc. the belief in the impossibility of contradiction] καὶ οἱ ἔτι παλαιότεροι.²¹⁰ The problem here is whether Plato means to include Prodicus amongst 'people like Protagoras'; if so, a distinction must still be made between a relativist interpretation of οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν (that of Protagoras) and a Prodican objectivist one, stressing some necessary correspondence between any statement and the world; the Didymus papyrus is full of references to τὰ πρᾶγματα.²¹¹

If one accepts the attribution, problematic as it is, Prodicus can then be seen as advocating a strict one-to-one, name-thing theory, perhaps (as Classen suggests²¹²) as a counter to Protagorean-style ὀρθόεπεια that is concerned with speaking appropriately for the occasion and for the speaker's benefit, and the Democritean claim that names are νόμῳ, not φύσει. If so, then Prodicus would be trying to demonstrate how Greek, properly understood, reflects important distinctions in reality. It is, in its fundamentals, a natural language.

This then could lead to the use of etymology as an analytical tool to show either that names that appear to have the same meaning do indeed have different nominata, i.e., that the full meaning of some words has escaped men's attention, or that some names are being incorrectly used at present. I offer two examples

to be accidents of pleasure; Prodicus might well agree that all three are intimately related to pleasure, but that their precise meanings should be distinguished.

²⁰⁶ Cf W. Burkert, 'Herodot über die Namen der Götter: Polytheismus als historisches Problem' *Museum Helveticum* 42 (1985), 121-132 (p. 128).

²⁰⁷ See C.C.W. Taylor, *Plato: Protagoras*, Clarendon Plato Series (Oxford, 1976), pp. 139-140.

²⁰⁸ G. Binder and L. Liesenborghs, 'Eine Zuweisung der Sentenz οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν an Prodikos von Keos', in *Museum Helveticum* 23 (1966), 37-43, reprinted in *Sophistik*, edited by C.J. Classen, Wege der Forschung Bd. 187 (Darmstadt, 1976), 452-462.

²⁰⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* D, 1024 b32-34.

²¹⁰ 286c2-3. Mansfeld, art. cit., p. 48, argues that Protagoras could not have seriously held this principle, at least if it is taken to rule out interpersonal disputes, and regards the Didymus papyrus as giving 'serious reasons' for attributing the maxim to Prodicus.

²¹¹ See M.M.A. Mackenzie, Review of G.B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*, in *Classical Review* 33 (1983) pp. 220-222.

²¹² Art. cit., pp. 237-8.

illustrating how Prodicus may have put etymology to use. Firstly, in the *Protagoras*, εὐφραίνεισθαι and ἡδεσθαι are distinguished thus: εὐφραίνεισθαι μὲν γὰρ ἔστιν μανθάνοντά τι καὶ φρονήσεως μεταλαμβάνοντα αὐτῇ τῇ διανοίᾳ, ἡδεσθαι δὲ ἐσθίοντά τι ἢ ἄλλο ἢ δὺ πάσχοντα αὐτῷ σώματι.²¹³ It is quite possible that the former is to be analyzed as εὐ + φρονεῖν, the latter ἡδυν + ἐσθίειν. In this case etymology aids making a distinction between mental and physical enjoyment, one which revises ordinary usage, implying a dualistic divide between the two types of pleasure.²¹⁴ Secondly, Galen reports that Prodicus derived φλέγμα from τὸ πεφλέχθαι, using it to refer to that portion of the humours that has been subject to heat and overcooked. What men call φλέγμα he names βλέννα ('mucus' or 'slime'), arguing that something cold and damp should not be called that. Galen remarks that Prodicus was known for his καινοτομία ἐν τοῖς ὀνόμασι, but that in this case τῇ λέξει μὲν ἑτέρως χρῆται, φυλάττει μὲντοι τὸ πρᾶγμα κατὰ ταὐτὸ τοῖς ἄλλοις.²¹⁵ In other words, the issue is not ontology but onomatology.

Goldschmidt argued that B5, in which we are told Prodicus claimed that the ancients deified the things that benefited their lives, with Demeter representing corn, Poseidon water, Hephaistos fire, etc.,²¹⁶ is recalled by *Cratylus* 404b8-9 where Demeter is etymologised thus: Δημήτηρ μὲν φαίνεται κατὰ τὴν δόσιν τῆς ἐδωδῆς διδοῦσα ὡς μήτηρ Δημήτηρ κεκληθῆσθαι. We do not know however if Prodicus etymologised at all to support such allegories. Goldschmidt pointed to a more certain link with Prodicus in the etymologies of ἡδονή, χαρά, τέρψις and εὐφροσύνη that occur in quick succession at 419b5ff;²¹⁷ given the testimony of Plato and Aristotle that Prodicus was interested in distinguishing names for pleasures it is hard to resist the conclusion that he is having fun here at Prodicus' expense.²¹⁸ There is more to say however. If one looks at the passage in the *Cratylus*, the generic noun ἡδονή is derived from ἡ πρὸς τὴν ὄνησιν ... τείνουσα πρᾶξις, and the three specific types of enjoyment turn out to be types of flux that give pleasure to the soul. In contrast, the generic word for 'pain', λύπη, is described in terms of the body,²¹⁹ ὀδύνη

²¹³ 337c2-4.

²¹⁴ Taylor, *op. cit.* pp. 137f, notes that such a rigid distinction cannot plausibly be made; also that these two verbs were used in fourth-century Greek in contexts both of mental and physical pleasure, and no pair of verbs did mark the distinction that Prodicus wants to make.

²¹⁵ Galen, *de virt. physic.* ii 9, = DK 84 B4; cf Philolaus: τό τ' αὖ φλέγμα τῶν πλείστων ψυχρὸν εἶναι λεγόντων αὐτὸς θερμὸν τῇ φύσει ὑποτίθεται. ἀπὸ γὰρ τοῦ φλέγειν φλέγμα εἰρῆσθαι (Menon Anonymi Londin., =DK 44 A 27); and Democritus, DK 68 A 159.

²¹⁶ Sextus Empiricus *adv. math.* ix 18.

²¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 139.

²¹⁸ Note that Plato and Aristotle give different versions of the distinctions, so that their testimonies are independent.

²¹⁹ ἀπὸ τῆς διαλύσεως τοῦ σώματος ἔοικεν ἐπωνομάσθαι, 419c1-2.

is derived ἀπὸ τῆς ἐνδύσεως τῆς λύπης, and the other names for types of pain can all be interpreted in this light. Thus a dualism is revealed, one that is not totally unplatonic, and which also calls to mind Prodicus' attempts to establish a dualism in the pair εὐφραίνεισθαι and ἡδεσθαι, only to correct it: (true) pleasure has to be seen in terms of the soul, and one cannot rigidly divide two types of pleasure, one belonging to the body independent of the soul. Plato has systematically established this dualism via one of Prodicus' tools, etymology, and he has done it by examining the same names that Prodicus did. The systematic aspect is important: Prodicus it seems used etymology occasionally, Plato uses it consistently as part of his investigation into the correctness of names.

This is not all: three other words that Socrates etymologises in this part of the etymological section are recorded as being the subjects of Prodicus word-distinctions, ἐπιθυμία and βούλεσθαι,²²⁰ and ἔρως.²²¹ This whole passage of names for pleasures and pains is it seems an elegant attack on Prodicus and his pretensions to have knowledge of ἡ ὀρθότης ὀνομάτων. An additional joke is that etymology, far from aiding fine distinctions, seems to collapse them: βουλή, βούλεσθαι and βουλεύεσθαι are revealed to be all ἀπικασματα τῆς βολῆς.²²²

The point about Prodicus using etymology inconsistently needs further elaboration. In fact etymology is just one tool of analysis that Prodicus uses; elsewhere he seems to examine or defer to ordinary usage,²²³ or extend it,²²⁴ and possibly we are meant to infer from *Charmides* 163b1-d4 that he appealed to the poets to justify his distinctions.²²⁵ Another point against a close identification with the *Cratylus* is the fact that his usual practice as far as we can tell was to analyze words in pairs; and Classen points to *Laches* 197b1ff as a place where the distinction being made could have included an etymology linking ἀνδρείος and ἀνῆρ. He concludes that Prodicus did not usually use etymology

²²⁰ We are told that Prodicus distinguished between ἐπιθυμῆν and βούλεσθαι at *Protagoras* 340a7-b1 (= DK 84 A 14).

²²¹ Stobaeus (iv 20, 65) preserves the following: ἐπιθυμίαν μὲν διπλασιασθῆναι ἔρωτα εἶναι, ἔρωτα δὲ διπλασιασθέντα μανίαν γίγνεσθαι (= DK 84B7).

²²² 420c3-6.

²²³ At *Protagoras* 340b3-c7 Socrates alludes to a distinction of Prodicus' between being and becoming; at 341a7-b5 we are told that Prodicus objects to Socrates calling Protagoras δεινός on the grounds that it is not a term of commendation in common usage.

²²⁴ E.g. the distinction between κοινός and ἴσος at 337a2-6; the latter does not usually mean 'undiscriminating', but Prodicus shows how the distinction can be reached by extension from the ordinary notion of giving equal shares, and the distinction is a useful one to make. See Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 136f.

²²⁵ This is perhaps also suggested by *Protagoras* 339e5ff where Socrates calls upon Prodicus to defend the reputation of his fellow-citizen, the poet Simonides. See especially 340c8-d5, where Socrates suggests that Prodicus and many others would agree with certain lines of Hesiod to back up the distinction between being and becoming.

in making his distinctions.²²⁶ One could argue that Plato does not accurately represent Prodicus' usual practice; but that does not harm the central point, that he used etymology intermittently, or rather, opportunistically.

It is plausible to maintain that Prodicus believed that the Greek language, if subjected to examination and a modicum of modification, reflected reality with a considerable degree of accuracy; names differ for a reason, and the reason is that they refer to (often subtly) different things.²²⁷ This is consistent both with a degree of blunting of the linguistic tools over time, necessitating resharpening old distinctions, and some refining of the existing language. In other words, he had a natural theory of the name-thing relation. This does not sound too far away from the theory and practice of the *Cratylus*. Yet there Socrates takes the hypothesis that Greek is a natural language and subjects it to an extensive etymological examination, for if Greek really is a natural, philosophically adequate language, that is what it needs; one cannot rest happy with ad hoc etymologizing or appeals to ordinary usage which may well be wrong. Again the point is that Plato is redefining ἡ ὀρθότης ὀνομάτων, making it into a proper philosophical study.

Two further details from other dialogues help illustrate the attitude of Plato to Prodicus' verbal distinctions. In the *Charmides* 163d1-7, Socrates reacts with impatience to Critias' Prodicus-style distinctions between ποεῖν, πράττειν and ἐργάζεσθαι, saying he has heard many such arguments from Prodicus. As far as he is concerned, Critias can use whatever name he wishes, so long as the nominatum is clear. Prodicus spends his time on verbal distinctions that might well have no objective validity; the important thing in examining something is to know what one is talking about, not what names ordinary Greeks apply to it, and other things like it. The implication seems to be that Prodicus attacks the problem of examining the relationship between language and reality far too much from the point of view of the existing Greek language (though not without the aim of correcting the language on occasion); to someone like Plato who is prepared to envisage the possibility of language failing radically to reflect the truth, such an approach is inevitably suspect, as it shifts the focus of attention from nominatum to name.

Secondly, in the *Protagoras* 340e8-341a2 Socrates remarks that it is good luck for them that they have Prodicus there for the investigation of Simonides' poem; his skill is a marvellous and ancient one, originating with Simonides, or perhaps going even further back. This is a common rhetorical means of

²²⁶ C.J. Classen, art. cit., pp. 232-236.

²²⁷ Cf the following remarks by Quine: 'Man is a practical and even a penurious animal, and as such he has little patience with multiple labels. Some say "furze" and some say "gorse", but none, in a state of nature, will say both. Faced with two terms for the same thing, one tends to cast about for a distinction.' (W.V. Quine, *Quiddities* (Harmondsworth, 1990), p. 24.).

downgrading the ideas of an opponent, claiming that he merely copied them from his predecessors;²²⁸ when the predecessor happens to be a poet from one's own city (339e6), the insult is magnified. Such jibes are important in a wider sense too, in that they reinforce the impression that Plato sees himself as standing against virtually the whole tradition of Greek thought, attacking the culture-wide confusion of assuming without any proper examination that the Greek language is in some sense natural. Prodicus arguably was someone who consciously held a 'natural' theory of naming, and who did examine the language, but he never went far enough. Again the originality of Plato is vindicated: he subjected the whole idea of naturalism in names to a proper test.

c) *Democritus on Names*

I close this section on the Sophists with a non-Sophist, reflecting the difficulty of pigeon-holing the polymathic Democritus. It might seem surprising to include him here, given that there is ample evidence as to where he stood on the νόμος versus φύσις debate.²²⁹ Yet there is a surprising amount of evidence that he did indulge in etymology. I have already mentioned that a Democritean etymology is relevant to the derivation of Ἀθηνᾶ from ἁ θεονόα;²³⁰ Sambursky pointed out Democritean influence in the etymologies of ἐκούσιον and ἀνάγκη;²³¹ the former is qualified by τὸ εἶκον καὶ μὴ ἀντιτυπῶν, which is a Democritean expression for movement through the void,²³² the latter by ἀντιτύπον, recalling ἀντιτυπία, 'resistance', a basic quality of matter;²³³ Diels drew attention to the link between 414a3-4 and B122a,²³⁴ and Goldschmidt argued that Plato had Democritus in mind in 412b1-8. Here the etymology σοφία φορᾶς ἐφάπτεσθαι σημαίνει can be linked, he suggests, to Aristotle's claim that Democritus and οἱ πλεῖστοι τῶν φυσιολόγων, ὅσοι λέγουσι περὶ αἰσθησεως, ἀτοπώτατόν τι ποιῶσιν· πάντα γὰρ τὰ αἰσθητὰ ἀπτὰ ποιῶσιν.²³⁵ That Democritus is in mind here is made more plausible still by

²²⁸ A good comparison is with *Cratylus* 402a4-c3, where Socrates tries to demonstrate that Heraclitean flux goes back to the poets, and implicitly accuses Heraclitus of plagiarism. Given that Heraclitus forcibly attacks Homer and Hesiod (see fr. 40, 42, 56 and 57) this is a telling blow.

²²⁹ See fr. B7-11, and 26.

²³⁰ See 5.4 above. The etymology in DK 68 B2 is clearer in the commentary of Tzetzes on the *Iliad*; see *Der unbekannte Teil der Ilias-Exegesis des Iohannes Tzetzes*, editio princeps, ed. A. Lolos (Königstein/Ts, 1981), ad A 194: τριτογένεια . . . κατὰ δὲ Δημόκριτον ἡ γὰρ γεννώσα: βουλεύειν καλῶς: πράττειν δεξιῶς: κρίνειν ὀρθῶς (p. 45, lines 3-6).

²³¹ S. Sambursky, 'A Democritean Metaphor in Plato's *Cratylus*', *Phronesis* 4 (1959), 1-4.

²³² See Simplicius, commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* 265b17ff (= DK 68 A 58).

²³³ See DK 68 A 66 (= Aetius, *Placita* i 26,2).

²³⁴ γυνή δὲ γονή μοι φαίνεται βούλεσθαι εἶναι and γυνή . . . ἥ, ὥς Δημόκριτος, γονή τις οὔσα, ἡ γονῆς δεκτική.

²³⁵ Aristotle *de sensu* iv, 442a29 (= DK 68 A 119).

a clue that Goldschmidt missed, namely the mention at 412b6 of Σοῦς. This recalls A 62, where Aristotle comments thus: ... φησὶ γὰρ οὐκ εἰς ἓν ὁρμᾶν τὸν σοῦν, λέγων σοῦν τὴν κίνησιν τῶν ἄνω φερομένων σωμάτων.

Now if this is correct, then one could perhaps argue that the etymology of φρόνησις is referring to the same Democritean ideas; Aristotle at *Metaphysics* Γ 5, 1009b7-15 (= DK 68 A 112) accuses Democritus and others of reducing φρόνησις to perception, or rather ἀλλοίωσις, and this might be equivalent to φορᾶς ... καὶ ῥοῦ νόησις.²³⁶ Again the point to these references according to my hypothesis would be that Democritus' theories are being gently mocked using one of his own tricks, etymology.

If one then looks at the list of titles of Democritean works preserved by Diogenes Laertius, the range of his interests becomes evident.²³⁷ Of particular interest for present purposes are those in the section headed Μουσικὰ δὲ τάδε, which includes Περὶ ποιήσιος, Περὶ καλλοσύνης ἐπέων, Περὶ εὐφώνων καὶ δυσφώνων γραμμάτων and Περὶ Ὀμήρου ἢ Ὀρθοεπείης καὶ γλωσσέων. We have other evidence of Democritus' respect for Homer and poetic inspiration in general,²³⁸ and for his interest in letters.²³⁹ All of which backs up the claim that Plato had Democritus in mind at various points in the dialogue. Yet this claim is a large one, given Plato's silence about Democritus in the dialogues; there is a doubt as to whether Plato knew Democritus' writings, though the strong likelihood is that he did.²⁴⁰ Having rehearsed the suggestive parallels between the fragments of Democritus and the *Cratylus*, one has to be satisfied with plausibility.

The most interesting question of all remains: why should Democritus, a νόμος man himself, worry about etymologies? B26, a report from Proclus' commentary on the *Cratylus*, seems at first sight clear enough: names are θέσει, a point he aimed to prove by means of four ἐπιχειρήματα, ὁμωνυμία, πολωνυμία, μετὰθεσις τῶν ὀνομάτων and ἡ ἔλλειψις τῶν ὁμοίων. Yet all is not so pellucid. The precise target of the arguments is not obvious and has led to controversy.²⁴¹ To put my view dogmatically, what the arguments are

²³⁶ 411d4.

²³⁷ D.L. ix 45-49, = DK 68 A 33.

²³⁸ Aristotle reports him as quoting a line of Homer with approval on the grounds that it backed up his views on the nature of soul and mind (*de anima* A2, 404a27-31, = DK 68 A 101), and in B21 he says that Homer had a divine nature; B18 declares his belief that ποιητῆς δὲ ἄσσα μὲν ἂν γράφῃ μετ' ἐνθουσιασμοῦ καὶ ἱεροῦ πνεύματος, καλὰ κάρτα ἐστίν..

²³⁹ B19, 20.

²⁴⁰ See R. Ferwerda, 'Democritus and Plato', in *Mnemosyne* iv, 25 (1972), 337-378; he remarks that 'there is no certain indication that Plato knew Democritus or that he used or combated his ideas in his dialogues. There are however so many texts, especially in the later dialogues, which could refer to atomist theories, that acquaintance with Democritus' books must be deemed very likely.' (p.359).

²⁴¹ For a brief discussion, see J. Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, revised edition (London, 1982), pp. 468-470. The authenticity of the fragment is defended vigorously by Burkert, who points

intended to refute *in their Proclan context* is the claim that Greek is a philosophically and philologically sound language which has one name and no more for each thing; that its names all follow logical patterns of morphology and so forth; and that it is a 'complete' language which leaves nothing unnamed. Such is the language envisaged of course in the *Cratylus*.²⁴² One suspects that Proclus has falsified the evidence to get a neat antithetical pairing of Pythagoras and Democritus.

Commentators have tried to reconcile Democritus' theoretical championing of convention to his etymologizing by drawing attention to another fragment B142,²⁴³ where three possible reasons are given for Socrates' reverence for the names of the gods at *Philebus* 12c, the second of which is that they are natural in the *Cratylus* sense, and the third, attributed to Democritus, being that they are ἀγάλματα φωνήεντα ... τῶν θεῶν. This is then glossed in Diels-Kranz by a passage from Hierocles: names are symbols or likenesses produced by the first namegivers, revealing in sounds the characteristics of the gods, just as a skilled sculptor reveals them in stone.²⁴⁴ Recently Hirschle has convincingly demonstrated that the attribution of the ὄνομα-ἄγαλμα thesis to Democritus is almost certainly a scribal error.²⁴⁵ Even so, the problem of reconciling conventionalism to fragments like B2, the etymology of Athena Tritogeneia (which seems admirably consistent with B 142), remains.

This being so, Oehler's thesis that Democritus developed the rudiments of semiotic theory is worth examining.²⁴⁶ He argues that Democritus did see names as ἀγάλματα φωνήεντα, interpreted in modern terms as signs that transmit to the hearer or reader a picture of reality. Furthermore, his theory of sense-perception, whereby streams of atoms create εἶδωλα that are instrumental on the way to knowledge but in themselves constitute a γνῶμη σκοτῆ,²⁴⁷

out that the fragment does not use the Aristotelian terminology which later became universal; he follows Hirschle in rejecting B 142 (see note 245); see art. cit., n. 206 pp. 127f.

²⁴² The reported theory of Pythagoras in B26 is highly reminiscent of Socrates' theory in the *Cratylus*; compare οὐκ ἄρα, φησὶ Πυθαγόρας, τοῦ τυχόντος ἐστὶ τὸ ὀνοματουργεῖν, ἀλλὰ τοῦ τὸν νοῦν ὀρῶντος καὶ τὴν φύσιν τῶν ὄντων in the Proclus passage to *Cratylus* 390e1-3: ... καὶ οὐ πάντα δημιουργὸν ὀνομάτων εἶναι, ἀλλὰ μόνον ἐκείνον τὸν ἀποβλέποντα εἰς τὸ τῇ φύσει ὄνομα ὃν ἐκάστω...

²⁴³ = Olympiodorus in *Plat. Phileb.* p. 242 Stallb.

²⁴⁴ For discussions see R. Philippson, 'Platons *Kratylos* und Democrit', *Philologische Wochenschrift* 49 (1929), 923-927, who attributes Epicurus' theory of the development of language to Democritus, interpreting B 142 as referring to the pristine origins of language, B 26 to its later, corrupt state; this is rejected by K. Oehler, who points out that only the names of the gods are mentioned. He prefers to attribute to Democritus a rudimentary semiotic theory ('Demokrit über Zeichen und Bezeichnung aus der Sicht der modernen Semiotik', in *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Democritus*, edited by L.G. Benakis, 2 volumes (Xanthi, 1984), i, 177-187).

²⁴⁵ M. Hirschle, *Sprachphilosophie und Namenmagie im Neuplatonismus. Mit einem Excurs zu 'Demokrit' B 142* (Meisenheim, 1979), pp. 63-65.

²⁴⁶ Art. cit., note 244.

²⁴⁷ B11.

allows for names to be signs that nevertheless remain divorced from the reality of atoms and void.

Fortunately one does not have to lean too heavily on the discredited B 142 to support a version of Oehler's thesis, for Democritus' views on the origins of civilization and culture are of help here. What is vital for the increasing grouping together of men is *χρεία* and *τὸ συμφέρον*; language arose as part of this process, but different languages came into being in different parts of the world.²⁴⁸ Names acquire their validity through agreement and custom, not through some natural relationship to their nominata; for all that they are still agreed 'pictures' of things. And so, argues Oehler, the only access to reality that men can enjoy directly is the partial and potentially misleading view offered by signs of various sorts.

This means that Democritus could have been interested in a critical way in etymology, investigating what men have meant by the names of the gods, much as Socrates investigates the opinions of men (or the first namegiver) about things as revealed in names.²⁴⁹ Classen, noting Democritus' penchant for introducing new terminology, links this to conventionalism: if names are conventional, we are free to add new ones; and Democritus' are usually etymologically perspicuous. Perhaps then both Plato and Democritus see names as in some sense or other signs that can give us insight into the opinions of men, but which are not to be trusted as far as the revelation of truth is concerned, forcing us to rely heavily on custom and agreement in naming. One then has to ask, however, if Democritus is indeed a target of the etymologies why did Plato think he was justified in attacking him?

The answer could be that Plato was simply being unfair; in his polemic he aimed to hit as many targets as possible, without always doing any justice to the thinkers involved. Anyone using etymology and apparently 'revealing the truth' about things is to be criticised.²⁵⁰ Thus Democritus could be represented as slipping into a typically Presocratic way of mishandling language, and contradicting his theoretical conventionalism at the same time. If so, Democritus' conventionalism is being misrepresented much as arguably Protagoras' relativism was earlier;²⁵¹ but Plato's misrepresentation of earlier thinkers is a constant problem for commentators on the etymologies.

Another possibility is that Plato simply misunderstood the subtleties of Democritus' position as being a form of naturalism; this is not a very appealing

²⁴⁸ Diodorus I 8, 3-4: . . . καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους τιθέντας σύμβολα περὶ ἐκάστου τῶν ὑποκειμένων γνώριμον σφίσιν αὐτοῖς ποιῆσαι τὴν περὶ ἀπάντων ἐρμηνείαν. τοιούτων δὲ συστημάτων γινομένων καθ' ἅπασαν τὴν οἰκουμένην, οὐχ ὁμόφωνον πάντας ἔχειν τὴν διάλεκτον, ἐκάστων ὡς ἔτυχε συνταξάντων τὰς λέξεις. . . (= DK 68 B 5, part).

²⁴⁹ See, e.g., 401a4-5. Cf C.J. Classen, art. cit., pp. 245-6.

²⁵⁰ Which would perhaps give us cause to look again at the ancient tradition of Plato's hostility towards Democritus, reported in D.L. ix 40; see Ferwerda, art. cit.

²⁵¹ See 5.9 a) above ad fin. with note 199.

thought. A third alternative is that Democritus was open to criticism. Although theoretically suspicious of the results of etymologizing, he did etymologize when it suited him, assuming, presumably, that one can 'read off' from names at least the opinions of men. Yet this assumption is itself thrown into question during the course of the *Cratylus* investigation, when so many alternative etymologies are seen to emerge, according to the whim of Socrates. One could accuse him then of not being suspicious enough of language and its wiles.

Alas, all this speculation rests on an unsteady foundation. There seems good reason to believe Plato had Democritus in mind as a target in the etymologies of the *Cratylus*;²⁵² why he would feel entitled to do this is a problem, perhaps malice or excess of polemical zeal, perhaps even ignorance. There is just a chance, however, that something more profound lies at the heart of his criticisms.

5.10 Conclusions

This completes my somewhat impressionistic survey of Plato's own brilliant and impressionistic overview of Greek thinkers and poets. What I have aimed to convey is a sense of a full-frontal attack by Plato on representative figures in Greek culture, poets, philosophers, 'philologists' and so on. Of course, I have by no means exhausted this line of inquiry, and would have liked to discuss other luminaries of early Greek thought, for example the historians Hecataeus and Hellanicus, whose extant fragments use etymology to explain names of places, men and tribes,²⁵³ and the anonymous author of the *Dissoi Logoi*;²⁵⁴ on the other hand, there are one or two omissions that might seem surprising,

²⁵² Thus Kahn, art. cit. (n. 124), p. 155f remarks that 'if we had more information on Democritus' views, there are probably many puzzling passages in the *Cratylus* which would appear in a clearer light.'

²⁵³ See F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechische Historiker*, I, 1 and 4 respectively. Hellanicus is particularly interesting in this regard; see, e.g., fr. 111 (= Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* i 35) for his derivation of 'Italy' from 'vitulus': Heracles, searching all over Italy for his lost heifer, asked the natives if they had seen it; they referred to it as a 'vitulus', and the lands through which it passed became known as 'Vitulia'. Varro, amongst others, used a variant of this etymology. There is a full discussion of both Hecataeus and Hellanicus in L. Pearson, *Early Ionian Historians* (Oxford, 1939).

²⁵⁴ Written c403-395 B.C. according to T.M. Robinson (*Contrasting Arguments—an Edition of the Dissoi Logoi* (New York, 1979), pp. 34-41). See especially chapter 5.11 and 12 where the author refers to how changing accents and transposing letters can change names completely, and compare *Cratylus* 398d4-5, 399a6-b4 and 414d7-e3, 418a5-b1 respectively. In 9.6 the author makes a connection between ἀνδρεία and Ἄρης as a mnemonic aid - cf *Cratylus* 407c9-d2. Note also the references to τραγῳδοποιίᾱ at 3.10, and Ἀναξαγόρειοι at 6.8. The numbers example at 5.14 seems, *pace* Robinson, to be making a different, and more radical point from that made at *Cratylus* 432a8-b1, claiming that if one takes away one from ten, one has neither ten nor one, whereas Socrates would say one no longer has ten, but nine.

Antisthenes perhaps, and certainly Heraclitus. Yet there seems to be no firm evidence that Plato has Antisthenes in mind in the *Cratylus*, and so I have concentrated my attention on other potential targets who have attracted less attention. To round off this survey, however, Heraclitus deserves some attention.

One is reminded of Heraclitus by the debate on the nature of τὸ δίκαιον, or τὸ διὰ ἰόν. Here the first two answers to Socrates' query as to the identity of the thing that pervades and is the cause of all things, namely the sun and fire, recall, suggests Kahn, B 16, 64-66, 94 and especially 100; he notes that connections between the sun, elemental fire, supreme intelligence and the cosmic causal factor are all made in these fragments. He is agnostic as to how far Heraclitus himself, or later Heracliteans are Plato's target here.²⁵⁵ Kahn's arguments are plausible; what needs stressing is that if Heraclitean doctrine in a broad sense is being attacked here, then Plato is poking fun at the doctrinal disputes amongst Heracliteans themselves.²⁵⁶ This can be shown more precisely. In the *Cratylus* the suggestion that the sun is that which 'goes through', and thus is justice, is ridiculed on the grounds that this would mean that there is no justice amongst men when the sun has set. One can imagine a Heraclitean countering a fellow believer who stresses the importance of the sun (quoting perhaps B 100) with B 16: τὸ μὴ δυνόν ποτε πῶς ἄν τις λάθῃ. Etymology thus here raises more problems than it solves, a nice attack on a thinker not adverse to drawing comfort from its practice.²⁵⁷

Another etymology that recalls Heraclitus is that of συμφέρον, τὴν ἅμα φορὰν τῆς ψυχῆς μετὰ τῶν πραγμάτων.²⁵⁸ B8 is not a direct quotation, but Kahn suggests that the phrase τὸ ἀντίξουν συμφέρον is quite possibly Heraclitean, with the image of the 'counter-thrust' actually bringing things together recalling that of the bow; in a figurative sense, what seems to be a hindrance has in fact a positive value.²⁵⁹ Plato has taken this idea and divested it of its air of paradox: now there is no counter-thrust, merely the intoxicating pursuit of fluxy things; an unfair exegesis of Heraclitus, but as usual he is writing polemically.

Several more of the *Cratylus* etymologies tempt one to suggest more tentatively that an anti-Heraclitean point is being made. The word οἴησις appears in two fragments, B 46 and 131, where it is to be translated as '(self) conceit', and it could just be that Plato is pointing to it as a Heraclitean term at 420b9-c3; unfortunately the genuineness of both fragments has been doubted, and it is hard to see exactly what the point of the reference might be here.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ C.H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 155-6 and 274-5.

²⁵⁶ Cf *Theaetetus* 179e2-180c6.

²⁵⁷ See e.g., B 23, 32, and 48 with Kahn's comments.

²⁵⁸ 417a3-6.

²⁵⁹ Kahn, p. 193.

²⁶⁰ Diels regarded the latter as not genuine, Kahn both.

Goldschmidt pointed to a possible link between B 73, ‘we should not act and speak like men asleep’, and the etymology of ψεύδος at 421b4-7;²⁶¹ certainly Heraclitus likens most men to people asleep.²⁶² Less plausibly he also sees a connection between B 100 and the etymology of ὤρα.²⁶³ Enough has been said to vindicate the idea that Plato had Heraclitus and Heracliteans on his mind, but not to an exclusive degree. Heraclitus and his followers are major villains of the piece, but are by no means the only ones, as I have tried to show.

The hypothesis of this chapter is that Plato is attacking the way in which various representatives of Greek culture have misunderstood the relationship between names and things. The detailed arguments and connections made to back up this hypothesis certainly do not prove it conclusively, but the general approach does, I believe, explain the many references to individuals and groups of thinkers, and the sheer variety of opinions that emerge in the etymologies. Being a considerable literary artist, Plato is no mere doxographer, rather he creatively reworks the ideas and etymologizing of his predecessors. This adds to the difficulty of identifying his sources and helps to explain the tenuous nature of the links that have to be drawn between etymology and thinker.

An opponent might justifiably ask however what connection has all this got with the extreme views of a Cratylus? Cratylus will declare at 435d4-6 that he who knows the names knows their *nominata*, a much more aggressive stance than that which most of the ‘targets’ suggested above would take, who either play with a few individual names, or take a particular text, be it Homer, Orpheus or whomsoever, and regard its special status as licensing etymological and allegorical interpretation. They do perhaps invert the name-thing relation in a limited number of cases, taking a particular name as a reliable guide to its *nominatum*’s nature, but this is a far cry from the Cratylan position. What has the bizarre Cratylan position which Socrates refutes to do with them?

My answer to this objection will be revealed in the final chapter. Briefly, I shall argue that using etymology at all in the way in which Plato accuses others of using it shows a belief in the magic of certain names, or of the names in a certain text, given by a great namegiver. Cratylus is the worst of the lot, but anyone who tries to bolster an argument with an etymology owes us an explanation as to why that particular name is special. We have in other words a scale of offenders, with Cratylus at one extreme. What such etymologists fail to do is to explain why a particular name, which conveniently supports their views, is correct, whilst others are not; Socrates by contrast, armed with a prescriptive theory as to what naming should be, subjects the hypothesis that Greek as a whole is a natural language to a thorough examination. We have no

²⁶¹ Goldschmidt, *op. cit.*, 140.

²⁶² B 1.

²⁶³ *Op. cit.*, p. 132.

reason to doubt that Plato was the first to carry out this sort of *general* examination of Greek, that he, in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' words, was the first to εἰσάγειν λόγον on the subject of etymology;²⁶⁴ thus we can discern different possible targets for the different parts of the etymologies, rather than one single target for the whole. The etymologies are 'inspired' by many precedents but remain Plato's creation.

²⁶⁴ *De compositione verborum* 16

CHAPTER 6

THE REFUTATION OF CRATYLUS

In this final chapter I shall discuss the closing section of the *Cratylus*, pages 428 to 440. This part of the dialogue has attracted much attention, particularly the final aporia; what has not been studied so extensively is the relationship between it and the etymologies. Any interpretation of the etymologies needs to explain what relevance the refutation of Cratylus has to what goes before. The interpretation of the details of the refutation of Cratylus forms another problem; and a third is the relationship of the final aporia to the rest of the dialogue. I shall deal with the refutation of Cratylus first, then discuss how this refutation extends to other versions of naturalism, even the selective varieties that emerged in the etymological section. Finally I shall discuss the close of the dialogue, which has the appearance of being almost an afterthought, and try to explain its place in the argument of the *Cratylus*.

6.1 Preliminaries

427d3-428d8 is a transitional passage between the long etymologies section and the final stage of the dialogue when Cratylus takes over as the interlocutor of Socrates. To mark the new beginning Plato partly rewrites the opening: Hermogenes' speech at 427d3-e4 explicitly repeats his complaint that Cratylus refuses to clarify his views on the correctness of names, and he directs at Cratylus a similar request to the one he had made to Socrates, to give his opinions;¹ Cratylus, like Socrates, remarks that it is no easy matter.² The emphasis on learning and teaching also recalls the opening pages,³ and at 428a6b1 Socrates reaffirms the hypothetical nature of what has gone before, recalling 391a4ff. Things have moved on however. Instead of being told of Cratylus' intellectual arrogance at second-hand, now we see it demonstrated, as he graciously accepts the possibility of making Socrates his pupil, entirely

¹ 383b8-384a7

² Compare 384a8-b2 with 427e5-7.

³ Compare 384b1ff, e1, with 427e3,4,6; 428b3,4; c1.

missing Socrates' rather unsubtle irony. (This would have a special resonance to Plato's audience if the tradition that Plato was a pupil of Cratylus' is correct.) He has no qualms about accepting the results of the etymological section, demonstrating clearly that he does not make the Socratic distinction between a prescriptive theory and a descriptive one. For Cratylus, the etymologies are ample proof that Greek is, in essentials, an ideal language, that there is no such distinction to be made.

Cratylus' differences with Socrates soon emerge. He is happy to agree that correct names show $\text{οἶόν ἐστι τὸ πρᾶγμα}$, that names are instruments for teaching and that naming is a skilled activity whose practitioners are the namegivers.⁴ Clearly this is a very brief résumé of the results of the tool analogy argument. Where Cratylus parts company however is over the status of names: a name is correct or is not a name at all; in this respect namegivers are different from painters and builders, who can be better or worse at their craft. Socrates probes him further.⁵ If *Hermogenes* is the name of someone with the appropriate nature, not Hermogenes, surely one lies if one says that the latter is *Hermogenes*? Cratylus interestingly does not understand Socrates' point until he puts it in the terms of a Sophistic cliché, to which he replies in time-honoured Eleatic fashion. Socrates then presses his line of attack by suggesting an imaginary case of mistaken identity, the man addressing Cratylus as Hermogenes son of Smikrion, i.e., getting his name wrong but (one presumes) his patronymic right; this, as Williams has shown,⁶ demonstrates how mistakes can arise: it is plain that the man addresses Cratylus, but incorrectly, and to that extent he is speaking falsely. Yet one understands that Cratylus, the man standing before him, is the subject of his address; thus names that fall short of the ideal in terms of describing their *nominata* can nevertheless refer to them consistently and thus function as names. Indeed the way is open for names that are used merely by convention. Cratylus however refuses to accept that a meaningful interchange has taken place: the stranger was merely producing noise.

Williams has illuminated this argument; the question I wish to focus on is what kind of thing Cratylus thinks a name is to warrant this special status. At 430b2 he enthusiastically agrees that names are imitations of things (πάντων μάλιστα); they are like paintings in that respect. Yet they do not fall short of reality in the same way. They are perfect copies. How does Cratylus think he can justify this? An answer can be found by looking back to the πρῶτα ὀνόματα theory. One interpretation of the theory regards the mimetic value of

⁴ 428e1-429a1.

⁵ 429c6-430a5.

⁶ B.A.O. Williams, 'Cratylus' Theory of Names and its Refutation', in *Language and Logos: Studies Presented to G.E.L. Owen*, edited by M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum (Cambridge, 1982), 83-93.

a complex name as the sum of the mimetic values of its component letters;⁷ change just one letter and one has a different essence imitated. In other words, the complex picture is the sum of a number of little pictures, each giving more or less direct access to a particular part of the nominatum's essence, with no allowance made for the effect of combinations of πρῶτα. Thus *Hermogenes* is a picture of the person who possesses the depicted essence, so it cannot be the name of Hermogenes, but rather the name of that other person.⁸ Now the appeal of this theory for Cratylus would lie in the fact that it does give him what he wants, the incorrigibility of (true) names and thus also the denial of the possibility of false speaking,⁹ combined with a mimetic function that theoretically gives insight into the nature of things. Cratylus is trying to force together two different things in his theory of names: on the one hand the 'mimetic glue' that binds name and named tightly together, on the other the logical discreteness offered by what one might call the 'infallibilist' theory, to avoid the blurring of boundaries that any other form of resemblance entails. The intended result is an ideal language that excludes any less than perfect names. It is as though, in Russell's terminology, names can give us (or at least the select few like Cratylus) knowledge by acquaintance rather than knowledge by description; as though etymologising is akin to seeing the object quite distinctly, where even a small change in the name is equivalent to seeing a different object.

It is important to note that Socrates does not fall into this trap. Mimeticism for Socrates is not a case of imitating the outward aspects of a nominandum like its cry—hence *baa-baa* is not a sheep's proper name—but its essence;¹⁰ otherwise anyone could call themselves a dialectician. Etymologising a name is not akin to seeing it. There is no direct link between name and thing such as Cratylus wants, rather the namegiver, as I have argued above, makes a choice about what to represent in a name, and a choice about the essential content to be attributed to the πρῶτα ὀνόματα. Koller argued that Socrates and Cratylus were interested in two distinct types of mimesis, *Sprache als Nachahmung/Abbildung* and *als Ausdruck* respectively: Socrates insists on a gap between name and thing, the former describing or imitating the latter, whereas Cratylus wants names not to be separated from their nominata, to bear a direct link to them, thereby obviating any question of correctness of naming.¹¹ This is very speculative,¹² but some such confusion is evident, as will become clear. As far

⁷ The 'list' interpretation of how complex names imitate. I shall suggest alternative views in 6.3.

⁸ 429b12-c4.

⁹ 429d4-6.

¹⁰ 423c11-e9.

¹¹ H. Koller, *Die Mimesis in der Antike: Nachahmung, Darstellung, Ausdruck* (Bern, 1954), 48-57.

¹² Koller has to claim that Plato is falsifying Cratylus' position. The 'Cratylan' theory that emerges is suspiciously like the theory reported as Stoic by Augustine in the *de dialectica*.

as the ‘infallibilist’ interpretation of the mimetic theory goes, I shall suggest later that Socrates hints at other more interesting variations on that particular theme. Socrates’ arguments are aimed at forcing Cratylus to see his confusions.

6.2 *The Refutation of Cratylus*

Socrates firstly gets Cratylus to agree that name and named are distinct, that the former is an imitation of the latter, and that painting too shares these characteristics. These are important points: if Cratylus wants to save his peculiar theory, he must qualify Socrates’ apparently bland propositions and justify his claim of a special relationship between names and things. Socrates’ position is the one that he has held throughout: names are irreducibly both secondary to things and different from them. There follows a discussion of διανομαί of paintings and names,¹³ then the analogy between painting and the πρῶτα ὀνόματα is pressed to show that there can be good namegivers as well as good painters.¹⁴ Cratylus is forced to agree that this consequence follows from the painting/naming analogy as drawn by Socrates, but believes he has an escape route: if we change even one letter of a name, that name has not been written, but another one. In other words, Cratylus thinks that he can evade the force of Socrates’ arguments by retreating to the ‘infallibilist’ position.¹⁵

Socrates however forces him to face up to the consequences of claiming that names are mimetic objects in the ‘Two Cratyluses’ argument. Cratylus treats names as if they were numbers: if one takes anything from, or adds anything to, the number ten, it is ten no more. Similarly, if one changes a name by just one letter, the referent changes. The πρῶτα are treated like numerical units; all have to be present and correct.¹⁶ Names however, like all likenesses, by their very nature fall short of perfection: if, *per impossibile*, some god created a perfect likeness of Cratylus down to the last detail, there would be not one, but two Cratyluses. Since likenesses are imperfect, one must allow names to reveal varying degrees of similarity to their nominata and still be counted as names, so long as the outline of the thing (its τύπος) is evident. Cratylus cannot both believe in mimetic names and reject the wider consequences of mimetic objects. This Cratylus accepts.¹⁷

¹³ 430b6–431c3. See above, section 2.1, for a discussion of this passage.

¹⁴ 431c4–e8.

¹⁵ 431e9–432a4.

¹⁶ See Roy Harris, *The Language-Makers* (London, 1980), pp. 33ff for a discussion of how modern treatments of numbers demonstrate the persistence of what he calls the *natural nomenclaturist* outlook.

¹⁷ 432a8–433b7.

The argument is a rhetorical tour de force but although Cratylus reluctantly agrees to the conclusion, he continues to be unhappy, as is manifested at 433c8-10. His faith in the 'glue' of mimeticism has been shaken. He is not however beaten yet, for although names cannot be perfect mimetic objects, there remains perhaps some mileage in the 'infallibilist' view of names. This is what Socrates attacks next.

Socrates gets Cratylus' agreement to the naturalist position, including the proposition that the elements of names are by nature like the elements of things; thus $\rho\omega$ imitates motionful things, and $\lambda\alpha\beta\delta\alpha$ things soft and gentle. This seems puzzling; why should Socrates need reminding that Cratylus believes in naturalism? Schofield suggests that Plato is signalling thereby that we are approaching the critical point of the refutation;¹⁸ this may be so, but note the emphasis put on the elements of the name being individually like the elements of things.¹⁹ Attention is now being focussed not so much on the complex names as on their components. Whereas the 'Two Cratyluses' argument attacked the theory from the direction of the complex name, the next argument will take a different tack, directing its fire at the elements.

Now Socrates presents Cratylus with the problems for the mimetic theory that Attic $\sigma\kappa\lambda\eta\rho\acute{o}\tau\eta\varsigma$ and Eretrian $\sigma\kappa\lambda\eta\rho\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$ present; he is forced first to say that $\sigma\iota\gamma\mu\alpha$ and $\rho\omega$ both signify motion, and then to claim that $\lambda\alpha\beta\delta\alpha$ is incorrectly inserted in both names, resulting in a recognition of the part custom plays, which is identified by Socrates with convention, $\sigma\upsilon\nu\theta\acute{\eta}\kappa\eta$. Convention then must play a part, as evidenced for example by the case of numbers, where it is unavoidable.²⁰ This argument is seen as forcing upon Cratylus a recognition that convention will inevitably be needed for the understanding of names. Undoubtedly it does, but in addition it also closes off Cratylus' alternative escape route, the 'infallibilist' view of names.

According to such a theory, a name is not an image like a statue which aims at the maximum amount of verisimilitude, but a schematic picture of the essential properties of a thing which requires expertise to uncover. Such a theory is not refuted by the 'Two Cratyluses' argument, precisely because it is not positing a 'perfect picture' view of names. We have seen how Cratylus flirts with this 'infallibilist' view of how names imitate things at 431e9-432a4; Socrates replies that this is treating names like numerical units, and then shows that the search for a perfect likeness is a chimaera. Having shown the fallacy involved in believing in perfect mimesis, Socrates then takes the 'infallibilist' case seriously with the $\sigma\kappa\lambda\eta\rho\acute{o}\tau\eta\varsigma/\sigma\kappa\lambda\eta\rho\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$ argument. If Cratylus really

¹⁸ M. Schofield, 'The Dénouement of the Cratylus', in *Language and Logos: Studies Presented to G.E.L. Owen*, edited by M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum (Cambridge, 1982), 61-81 (p. 72).

¹⁹ 433d4-5, 434a3ff.

²⁰ For a close study of the argument from 433 to 435 see M. Schofield, art. cit.

wants to hold that the addition or subtraction of any letter creates a new *nominatum*, he is then neatly trapped: neither σκληρότης nor σκληροτήρ name 'hardness' but something else entirely. And if he wants to continue believing that it is an acceptable natural name, he must accept not only a measure of convention but also the kind of modified mimeticism that makes names mere second-rate copies of their *nominata*.

The second reference to numbers at 435b6-c2 is then given additional point: Cratylus may try to escape the 'Two Cratyluses' argument in this way, but in fact that too is a dead end, for numbers, while they satisfy the standards of discreteness that Cratylus wants from names, are a paradigmatic case of the need for convention in naming. Thus the 'Two Cratyluses' and the σκληρότης/σκληροτήρ arguments taken together form a pincer movement on Cratylus' theory and together make a nonsense of his claims that Greek is a language of ideal names and a modicum of hot air, one attacking his theory from the point of view of the complex name, the other from that of the elements. If he wants mimeticism, he must accept degrees of similarity and thus good and bad names; if he wants the infallibilist theory and a language where no names are not 'true' names, he must construct it himself—in other words, the prescriptive-descriptive distinction is central once again. At present, he is left with names revealing quite different (and unknown) essences from the ones he thought they did. If σκληρότης does not mean 'hardness', what does it mean? And so if he wants to maintain any degree of naturalism he has to fall back on a judicious mixture of convention and mimeticism.

An advantage of this interpretation is that it explains what is wrong with a criticism of the argument made by Annas, who sees Cratylus' suggestion at 434d9-12 that the λάβδα ought not to be in σκληρότης/σκληροτήρ at all as a fair point given Socrates' own practice earlier. She thus finds this single example on the basis of which the *πρῶτα ὀνόματα* theory is rejected 'far from convincing'.²¹ It should be plain now why the single example is enough: if Cratylus is pursuing the 'infallibilist' view of names anything lacking from a name makes it a name of something completely different. The alternative is to accept a different view of naming, allowing convention and less severe standards of mimesis. Once convention is allowed in at all, it is hard to see where Cratylus can draw a line.

One could object that Cratylus gives no sign that he is trying to retreat in this direction. To this I would reply that he certainly does show that he has both the perfect likeness and the 'infallibilist' views of names in mind, and that Socrates hints at such a retreat at 435b6-7: ἐπεὶ, ὦ βέλτιστε, εἰ 'θέλεις ἐπὶ τὸν

²¹ J. Annas, 'Knowledge and Language: the *Theaetetus* and the *Cratylus*' in *Language and Logos: Studies Presented to G.E.L. Owen*, edited by M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum (Cambridge, 1982) 95-114 (p.108).

ἀριθμὸν ἐλθεῖν. In any case, as far as the wider purpose of the dialogue goes, Plato has demonstrated that there is no hiding place in the 'infallibilist' position for would-be Cratyluses.

A more serious objection to my interpretation is that surely Socrates dealt with the 'infallibilist' option with the 'Two Cratyluses' argument, which argues that there can be inappropriate letters in names.²² Related to this is the point that Cratylus himself is prepared to allow that letters are present through custom rather than nature.²³ This, however, is to overlook the direction of attack; Socrates is here attending to the elements of names, attacking the possibility that one might save naturalism by claiming that many names, if not perfect mimetic representations of their nominata, nevertheless are built up out of elements that, taken together, give a schematic imitation of the nominatum's essence. Taking two variants on a name, both of which Cratylus seems prepared to regard as more or less correct, Socrates shows how if the 'infallibilist' view is taken any distance at all it collapses, and convention must enter in. Once Cratylus has admitted that custom plays a part in the understanding of names, he has lost the argument. Even if he argues that λάβδα is not part of the essence of σκληρότης, but rather a meaningless extra letter, he cannot square this with the 'infallibilist' viewpoint.

Another point of interest in this argument is that Plato forces to Cratylus' attention the link between custom, ἔθος, and convention, συνθήκη. Presumably the point is that a linguistic habit presupposes an original convention. Why however should Socrates emphasise the link? As Schofield remarks, 'the appeal to habit alone is sufficient to rule naturalism out of court as an explanation of our understanding of words in speech.'²⁴ What it does do is to push convention back firmly into the picture, reminding us of the contribution that Hermogenes' theory, extreme though it was, made to the earlier discussion. One makes a convention with oneself to understand σκληρότης as 'hardness', despite its mimetic deficiencies.²⁵ Cratylus assumes that the name is, or was correct, and that its slight deficiencies are due to the ravages of time. Custom allows us to recognize it for what it is. What he does not allow for, holding the theory that he does, is the creativeness of name-making. Names for Cratylus are in theory predetermined by the natures of their nominata; naming is thus uncovering (true) names rather than creating afresh.²⁶ What Hermogenes'

²² 432d11-e3.

²³ 434e4.

²⁴ Art. cit., p. 78.

²⁵ 435a5-10, cf 384c10ff

²⁶ Williams puts the point well: 'According to Cratylus, there is no act which a *nomothetes* or anyone else can perform to *make* "N" the name of Y—"N" either bears the required Ø-relation to Y or it does not. Hence what is called "name-giving" will be merely a trivial variant on describing.'" (art. cit., pp. 89-90.)

theory contributes is the idea that one can be a genuine namegiver, that one can assent to calling *x* *y*, and one can change it for a better name.²⁷ Names are not stable entities, but are subject to flux themselves; as such, both in using existing names and creating new ones one makes a convention so as to fix them in a given meaning. This fluxiness of names is shortly to be pushed to the fore, as part of Socrates' wholesale rejection of inverting name and thing.

Cratylus' bizarre claims have been refuted. Two problems arise. At 435d1 Socrates starts up on a new tack, but what is left for him to prove if Cratylus has been routed? To put the matter briefly, whilst one extreme version of naturalism has been refuted, more moderate varieties, such as emerged in the course of the etymologies, have been left standing. Socrates thus still has unfinished business. Secondly, one is bound to ask how far the mimetic theory that Socrates outlined is safe from these arguments. This second question I shall tackle first.

6.3 *Variations on the πρῶτα ὀνόματα Theory*

Socrates is under no illusions about the mimetic theory, calling his provisional speculations ridiculous;²⁸ as I have attempted to show, he also insists on the values of the *πρῶτα* being a choice of the namegiver rather than as being 'given' by the letters themselves, and makes clear that names are secondary to their *nominata*.²⁹ One further aspect of his treatment of the theory marks him out from Cratylus however and deserves attention. This is his views on the effects of combinations of *πρῶτα*.

Cratylus seems to assume that the *πρῶτα* each have a single value that is not materially affected by the different combinations any one of them might enter into. On this view the essence revealed is the sum of the parts of the name, i.e., the letters.³⁰ By contrast Socrates hints at a more complex view. Far from it merely being the mimetic values of letters that are in play, it is said repeatedly that essences are revealed by means of letters and syllables;³¹ in 424b7-425b3 Socrates talks of the need to sort out the elements of language and reality, then to apply them like a painter uses his dyes, sometimes using one letter, sometimes several mixed together (sc. to imitate one thing); and amongst Socrates' suggestions for the values of the *πρῶτα* is one for γάμμα plus λάβδα. Socrates has more in mind for the mimetic theory than names being

²⁷ See my comments in 2.2 above.

²⁸ 425d1-3, 426b5-6

²⁹ See 3.3 above.

³⁰ See in particular 431e9-432a4.

³¹ See 423e7-9; 424a9-b2, b8-10; 425d1-3.

merely the sum of their $\pi\rho\omega\tau\alpha$, or in other words, the ‘list’ view of how names have meaning. The possibilities now become intriguing: if letters combined in various ways into syllables produce new mimetic meanings, the possibilities of the whole theory are radically enlarged and the apparent discrepancy between the limited values produced by mimesis as opposed to the richness of the semantic method could be reduced, perhaps to nothing (though learning the ‘natural’ vocabulary of the language would be more and more difficult).

The problem is that he does not follow these hints up, presumably because he believes the results for Greek are so ridiculous as not to be worth the trouble. What is left is a model of how an ideal language should work. Where he does look further into the general question of elements and compounds however is the third part of the *Theaetetus*: here letters and syllables are used as a means of discussing the relationship of parts to wholes and several different types of ‘account’ are discussed, including one that glosses ‘account’ as being able to go through something element by element, contrasted to going through it in terms of its larger constituents; Socrates could not mention all the hundred timbers of a Hesiodic wagon, merely the larger parts, like the axle, rails, and so forth.³² Thus knowledge consists of knowing how the elements combine and what their different capacities are. Extend this to names, and the skilled etymologist/dialectician would possess knowledge of how the individual values of the letters are changed by combination to produce new or slightly modified values. If one wants to speculate on how Plato might have developed the $\pi\rho\omega\tau\alpha$ theory, this part of the *Theaetetus* is perhaps the place to look.

Yet all this is highly speculative; the plain fact is that Plato does not seem interested in pushing further with the $\pi\rho\omega\tau\alpha$ theory. The safest conclusion to draw is that we are to distinguish here as elsewhere between Socrates and Cratylus. With this conservative conclusion it is time to pass on.

6.4 *The Attack on Naturalism Continued*

At 435d1ff Socrates resumes his attack. Firstly, he gets Cratylus to reiterate his view that the prime function of names is to teach.³³ Cratylus’ statement of this point however is stronger than ever: whoever knows the name of something, knows the thing itself. He also asserts that learning from names is the sole and best means of learning, and that this method is equally to be used for seeking and discovering as well as learning. This is the extreme of the inversion of name and thing: the name has become the sole means of judging the nature of its nominatum. Two questions suggest themselves. Why does Cratylus put forward

³² *Theaetetus* 206e5ff.

³³ Cf 428e4-5.

this bizarre proposition? And what connection has this extreme position with the moderate cases alluded to in the etymologies, where etymology is used as a support for theories, not as the sole means of discovering truths?

The answer to the first question becomes clearer as one reads on in the last few pages of the dialogue. Cratylus is an enthusiastic believer in the flux theory;³⁴ things therefore are not reliable as objects of knowledge, whereas names are.³⁵ Whilst some of his beliefs have been refuted, i.e., the belief that Greek is an ideal, natural language, Socrates has not shown yet that there are no names at all in Greek that have the property of revealing essences. Such putative natural names are not flux-ridden in a way that would defeat attempts at knowledge. This explains the series of extraordinary claims that Cratylus makes: if things are in flux, we cannot talk and 'teach' each other unless names have the stability of meaning that allows them to be examined and known.

Yet this bold claim seems far stronger than anything other Presocratic practitioners of etymology would make, and it looks as if Plato has taken an argumentative sledgehammer to crack an eccentric nut. It is true that in the *Theaetetus* only Parmenides and his followers escape the charge of being champions of flux,³⁶ but if Plato means seriously to accuse almost all Greek thinkers and poets of being supporters of *radical* flux one is bound to find his charge a gross exaggeration. Yet he can accuse them of believing, like Cratylus, in the existence of names that are stable in their meanings, names which offer a route to knowledge of their *nominata*, in that they support previously held beliefs. Such opportunistic etymologists then have to claim either that the whole language consists of correct names, or that only some are correct. Now since the former option has been rendered unattractive, the latter is preferable. These would-be etymologists still owe however an explanation as to why their favoured names are correct. And any explanation, it will be shown, has to be extra-linguistic, on pain of absurdity. Thus it will be seen that these latter arguments, unlike the 'Two Cratyluses' and *σκληρότης/σκληροτήρ* arguments, hit home against any attempts to etymologize in support of one's ideas, for they all start to invert the priority of named to name.³⁷

³⁴ Thus at 437a1 he agrees that the etymologies of Greek names point to flux, καὶ ὁρθῶς γε σημαίνει; cf 437d1-2 and especially 440d7-e2.

³⁵ W. Schadewaldt, 'Platon und Kratylus: Ein Hinweis', in *Philomathes: Studies and Essays in the Humanities in Memory of Philip Merlan*, edited by R.B. Palmer and R. Hamerton-Kelly (The Hague, 1971), 3-11, argues that when Plato was under Cratylan influence he saw the possibility of using names as a basis for knowledge; whatever the historical truth of that, Schadewaldt is correct to draw attention to Cratylus' use of names as the foundation of knowledge in a fluxy world.

³⁶ *Theaetetus* 152d2-e9.

³⁷ An objection: the 'Two Cratyluses' argument also attacks the majority of etymologists with its attack on mimeticism. Not so; the vast majority of the etymologies use the 'semantic' method. Cratylus on the other hand has explicitly approved the mimetic theory.

If one is to claim that certain names are ‘natural’, blessed above the rest of the vocabulary, one needs to show how this has come about;³⁸ either one can claim that the namegiver was inspired, or seek refuge in the gods. Socrates argues against each option in turn. Thus he points out that if the namegiver’s view of reality was faulty, so too is his handiwork, and in following him we are condemned to be misled.³⁹ Cratylus in response firstly merely repeats his view that names to be names must be correct; he has not taken Socrates’ arguments to heart. Secondly, he points to the consistency of the etymological results. Socrates has a ready reply to this. In general, internal consistency alone is not a decisive argument for the truth of any system; false axioms in geometry lead to consistent but false conclusions. As for the etymological examination in particular, he demonstrates with ease how contradictory results can be obtained from names.⁴⁰ Any etymologist who seeks to find a consistent view of the world from names, be it fluxy or whatever, must explain why his interpretation is the correct one.

This radical instability of interpreting names vitiates any use of etymology as a philosophical tool. One can never know if one has interpreted a name correctly; if an etymological interpretation and an empirical investigation come up with the same result, that gives one no warrant to regard the etymology as evidence for the belief. Even if one built up over time an enormous list of names of a given language that were certified correct in this way, one would still have insufficient grounds for assuming that another name of the same language is correct without first examining its nominatum. The temptation to pick out a name and etymologize it in this self-serving way is ever-present, but Plato knows that profound mistakes lie in this direction.

At 437e8ff Socrates returns to Cratylus’ earlier claim that knowledge is gained from names alone. This leads to the absurdity that a wise namegiver is a logical impossibility, for where could he acquire any knowledge if no names existed? (The alternative possibility left unexpressed is that he gave names regardless, which were of no value.) Cratylus’ belief in flux led him to posit names as the bearers of stability in the world; but the combination of this theory and the demand that he explain the origin of Greek as a natural language produces absurdity; the moral again is that things, not names, must come first.

Confronted with this embarrassing result Cratylus retreats to the second option outlined above, positing a divine source for the first names,⁴¹ but that again fails because of the contradictory results of the etymological examinations:

³⁸ Cf my comments in section 2.2 above.

³⁹ 436b5-11.

⁴⁰ 436c7-437c8.

⁴¹ It is not clear whether τὰ πρῶτα ὀνόματα at 438c3 has a temporal or logical sense.

one cannot believe that a god would contradict himself in this way.⁴² In addition, this introduction of the gods contrasts with Socrates' practice at 425d3-8, where to introduce the gods in this way to explain the elements of language was merely a refuge from rendering an account. The intellectual bankruptcy of Cratylus is thereby emphasised, and the final aporia foreshadowed, as I shall try to show below. Both alternative explanations of the namegiver's expertise having been rebuffed, the implicit message is that we cannot trust the wisdom of others; to arrive at a natural language it seems that we must be both namegiver and dialectician.⁴³

A final point is that we are perhaps also to recall Socrates' comment at 397c1-2 concerning the names of τὰ αἰεὶ ὄντα καὶ πεφυκότα· ἴσως δ' ἔνια αὐτῶν καὶ ὑπὸ θειοτέρας δυνάμεως ἢ τῆς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐτέθη. Compare 438c2-3: μείζω τινα δύνάμιν εἶναι ἢ ἀνθρωπίαν τὴν θεμένην τὰ πρῶτα ὀνόματα τοῖς πράγμασιν. Cratylus was listening throughout the long conversation between Socrates and Hermogenes after all.

Socrates can now draw his conclusions. When names are in revolt against each other it is clear that we need an extra-linguistic standard to adjudicate between them. Note the expression Socrates uses, 'Ονομάτων οὖν στασισάντων; Loraux demonstrates how Plato plays on the ambiguity in the word στάσις, with the idea of a civil war amongst words playing upon its 'political' sense of 'sedition', whereas elsewhere in its 'philosophical' sense it regularly opposes κίνησις, for example at 426d1-3. The war between flux and stability is fought out in the word στάσις itself. Cratylus does not want to admit to the fluxy nature of words, but Socrates forces it to his attention.⁴⁴ This then is another mortal blow to the idea that names have a stability that flux-ridden things lack. And if names are our only source of knowledge, we are in a sorry plight.

This however is not the conclusion Socrates draws, at least not yet. Instead he remarks Ὡς ἔοικεν, ὦ Κρατύλε, δυνατόν μαθεῖν ἄνευ ὀνομάτων τὰ ὄντα, εἴπερ ταῦτα οὕτως ἔχει.⁴⁵ The assumption that acquiring knowledge is possible is the guiding principle throughout the dialogue, from the point when the theories of Protagoras and Euthydemus are rejected at 385e4-386d7; and so instead of any sceptical conclusion being drawn from the failure of the naturalist experiment, Socrates gets Cratylus to agree that we should not try to learn about things through their names but

⁴² Note the pun θεῖς-θεός at 438c5-6, suggesting a derivation from τιθέναι, contrasting therefore with the derivation from θεῖν at 397c8-d7. Compare the alternative etymologies of Ἑρμῆς, the first hinted at by Socrates at 384c3-6, the latter at 407e1-408b3.

⁴³ Cf my conclusions in 3.4 above.

⁴⁴ N. Loraux, 'Cratyle à l'Epreuve de Stasis', *Revue de Philosophie Ancienne* 5 (1987), 49-69.

⁴⁵ 438e2-3.

through examination of the things themselves. Quite what this means is hard to say, as Socrates admits;⁴⁶ the important point to grasp is that etymology is a mere distraction.

Cratylus has been refuted insofar as using etymology to prove his fluxy views is concerned. There could be natural names in Greek; but whether there are or not would require a knowledge of their *nominata*. This holds good for any etymologizing. Because names are at best poor images of things, etymology is of mere academic interest to the serious philosopher. Thus Plato, whilst refuting Cratylus, also strikes home against other unwary practitioners of etymology.

6.5 *The Final Aporia (439b9-440e7)*

At 439b10 Socrates starts the final argument of the dialogue, having reached the conclusion that we should examine things not names in order to find out about reality. This argument has the appearance of being almost an after-thought, with no very clear relationship to what precedes it; this appearance is reflected in the varied interpretations of commentators, who tend to treat the argument in isolation. One task to be attempted below is to try to explain why Plato has closed the dialogue on this note instead of finishing at 439b9, with Cratylus having more or less admitted defeat. Related to this is the interpretation of the *aporia* itself; no consensus has emerged over its intent or quality.

One interpretation of 439cff claims that Socrates, believing both that sensibles are in extreme flux and that knowledge is possible, shows that the possibility of knowledge demands we assume the existence of flux-free Forms; for if, *per impossibile*, a Form were in extreme flux it could neither be known nor be an individual at all. Which is absurd; therefore, if knowledge is possible, Forms exist.⁴⁷ This interpretation is problematic on several counts. Firstly, it gives Plato a bad argument: the conclusion that 'there is only knowledge of what is totally unchanging' from there is no knowledge of what is in extreme flux' needs extra premises to the effect that the sensible world is in extreme flux and that there is nothing other than the Forms and the fluxy sensible world to

⁴⁶ 439b4-5. T. Irwin, in *Plato's Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 66-68, offers a suggestion as to what learning from things amounts to.

⁴⁷ See H. Cherniss, 'The Relation of the *Timaeus* to Plato's Later Dialogues', reprinted in *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, edited by R.E. Allen (London, 1965), 339-378 (356-7); cf his 'The Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas', reprinted in Allen, 1-12 (9-10); W.D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford, 1951), who comments: 'This is the first distinct appearance in Plato of the argument from the existence of knowledge to the existence of unchangeable, non-sensible objects.' (pp. 20-1). N. Gulley, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1962), 70-76, argues that Plato believes sensibles are in extreme flux and *assumes* the existence of Forms.

be known. Neither is argued for.⁴⁸ There are degrees of flux; the argument can be read as proving precisely the existence of something stable in *this* world, as opposed to the next.⁴⁹ Secondly, Socrates assumes the existence of Forms, but he does not argue for them; the argument is a hypothetical one, exploring the consequences of assuming that everything is in a state of extreme flux.⁵⁰ This interpretation therefore saddles Plato with a logical fallacy and resorts to a strained reading of the text.

Further disputes have arisen over the status of the εἶδη in the final aporia. Various commentators have argued that they fall short in one way or another of the mature middle-period theory of Forms. Thus Irwin denies that the Forms are separated Forms at all, referring us back to the 'stable natures' of 386de and 389ab,⁵¹ whilst Luce argues that Plato's theory is here at a transitional stage, before he separated the Forms.⁵² Calvert however argues that Plato is further down the path towards the middle-period theory.⁵³ It is clear that the use of ὀνειρώττω at 439c7 is some kind of 'distancing' device, and that we do not see here the confidence of the *Phaedo* or the *Republic*; but this could be wistful looking back at previous certainties as much as looking forward to the mature theory. Below I shall give reasons for seeing these forms as middle-period Forms.

Now if the argument is a bad one for Forms, the question arises, was Plato aware of the fact, or was he consciously using a fallacious argument? Or is there a way of interpreting it to yield a sound argument? On the former question, Calvert is disappointed that Plato does not seem to grasp the different possible interpretations of flux and that in the case of the Form of Knowledge he appears to have an 'all or nothing' approach to knowledge; this he thinks points to Plato's uncertainty about the status of sensibles and the theory of Forms at the time.⁵⁴ Thornton on the other hand detects the same ambiguities in the use of flux but feels that Plato is aware that extreme flux and Forms are contraries not contradictories, though he gives no reasons for this belief.⁵⁵ On the latter point, Owen (and perhaps Irwin) seem to think that the argument is a good one for

⁴⁸ Gulley, pp. 72-73, argues for interpreting 439d4 as '(for) all these things appear to be in flux', i.e. he claims that Plato explicitly says that sensibles are in flux; against this, the easier reading grammatically, as Gulley himself admits, is to include it within the εἰ clause (and [whether] all these are in flux), and Socrates explicitly says that the flux issue is undecided at 440c1-3, contradicting himself on Gulley's reading.

⁴⁹ This is the interpretation Owen seems to favour; see 'The Place of the *Timaeus* in Plato's Dialogues', in Allen, 313-338 (p. 323, n.3).

⁵⁰ See M.T. Thornton, 'Knowledge and Flux in Plato's *Cratylus* (438-440)', *Dialogue* 8 (1969-70), 581-591.

⁵¹ T.H. Irwin, 'Plato's Heracliteanism', *Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1977), 1-13 (p.2).

⁵² J.V. Luce, 'The Theory of Ideas in the *Cratylus*', *Phronesis* 10 (1965), 21-36.

⁵³ B. Calvert, 'Forms and Flux in Plato's *Cratylus*', *Phronesis* 15 (1970), 26-47.

⁵⁴ Art. cit., pp. 37ff

⁵⁵ Art. cit., pp. 590-1.

showing the necessity of something being stable in the sensible world, in the spirit of *Theaetetus* 181-3;⁵⁶ yet this interpretation does not come to terms with the awkwardness of the second half of the aporia dealing with the Form of Knowledge.

Recently Mackenzie has put forward a novel interpretation of the argument. She sees it as the culmination of a series of aporiai which, taken together, attack the theory of Forms rather than defend it. Anything in flux is too indeterminate to count as an individual at all; but if one posits a stable entity, it cannot become known, for that counts as a change in the object and consigns it to a fluxy fate (this is what she calls the 'ontological argument'). Furthermore, any knowledge of anything in flux would itself come under the influence of flux and be no more knowledge than not-knowledge, whilst any case of stability offers knowledge, but at a cost: if what is known is changeless, what knows it must be changeless too. Thus it is impossible to come to know; but this conclusion itself is something we have come to know (the 'epistemological argument'). Thus we are faced with the paradox 'I know that I know nothing' in a vicious form.⁵⁷

This view has attractions: Plato is not now peddling a simple fallacy but confronting us with a powerful argument that threatens our ability to acquire knowledge, the fundamental assumption of the dialogue; the dialogue becomes a sophisticated forerunner to the late, 'critical' dialogues. There are stumbling blocks however. The major problem seems to be the claim that extreme flux and Forms are contradictories; for this one must assume that being known constitutes a real change for the object, which is unconvincing. If one denies that coming to be known constitutes a change, then there can be cases of coming to know.

Yet there is more to be said concerning the second part of the aporia, concerning the Form of Knowledge. If the Form of Knowledge changes from being knowledge into something other than knowledge it will not be knowledge but something else. Either knowledge is and always will be knowledge, or it will change and be knowledge no longer. And if there is always that which knows, that which is known and in short τὸ καλόν, τὸ ἀγαθόν and ἐν ἑκάστων τῶν ὄντων, all this is quite unlike flux.⁵⁸ Knowledge must be perpetually stable. This can be taken to mean that Plato puts special conditions on 'real' knowledge, namely that it should be timeless;⁵⁹ yet there are reasons for being unhappy with the argument as it stands. It implies: either one knows or one is in the depths of ignorance (what Calvert calls the 'all or nothing'

⁵⁶ locc. citt.

⁵⁷ M.M.A. Mackenzie, 'Putting the *Cratylus* in its Place', *Classical Quarterly* 36 (1986), 124-150.

⁵⁸ 440a6-c1.

⁵⁹ So J.C.B. Gosling, *Plato* (London, 1973), pp. 153-7.

approach⁶⁰), an 'atomistic' view that recalls the problem of false speaking that was raised only to be rejected by Socrates as too hard a problem for him at his age.⁶¹ Likewise the eternal stability of knowledge raises problems. Take τὸ γιγνώσκον; who or what is that which knows? It cannot be humans, for, conceivably, there might be no humans who know and thus the ἀεί of 440b5 would be inappropriate;⁶² thus it must be a divine knower. About the gods however, we know nothing, as Socrates hastens to point out to Hermogenes earlier.⁶³ And so the *leitmotiv* of divine knowledge and human ignorance reaches its climax here: bereft of knowledge amongst the flux of our human world, we can but wonder at the wisdom of the gods.

One further point to strengthen the feeling of unease with the argument of 440ab is the repeated use of μεταπίπτειν. There is an Eleatic argument that Melissus deployed which shows a similar use of μεταπίπτειν, an argument designed to show that common sense beliefs in the veridical nature of the senses and the consequent belief in a plurality of things are inconsistent with the dictates of reason. If there is a plurality of things they would have to be of the same kind as Melissus has shown the One to be, always just as it is, on pain of being indeterminate and according to Eleatic reasoning unreal; but if we believe our senses we believe in a plurality of changing things in the world. Thus Eleatic reasoning and a belief in the reliability of the senses are incompatible.⁶⁴ Now since reason has shown belief in the senses to be irrational, we should accept the Eleatic doctrine and if we wish to have a plurality of things we must assume they are eternal and unchanging. Yet it was our belief in the veridical nature of our senses led us to that belief in a plurality of things originally, so the loss of the former conviction should lead us to give up the idea of a plurality of things.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Art. cit., p. 43. Calvert compares Plato's argument here unfavourably to the *Republic*, and sees the 'unsophisticated epistemology' here relative to that dialogue as evidence for dating the *Cratylus* before the *Republic* (note 19).

⁶¹ 429d1-8.

⁶² Note how 440b5-6, with its list headed by τὸ γιγνώσκον, could be misinterpreted as making the existence of the Forms dependent upon their being known eternally, suggesting, as Mackenzie puts it, that 'knower and the known stand and fall together' (art. cit., p. 147).

⁶³ 400d6-9, cf 407d6-7, 408d4-5.

⁶⁴ For text, translation and discussion of fragment 8 see G.S. Kirk, J. Raven and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, second edition (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 398-400; J. Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, revised edition (London, 1982), pp. 298-302. Of course, even if Plato was alluding to Eleatic strategies he might have had a different argument in mind, but an allusion to an Eleatic argument does have particular point when a dichotomy is being set up between Heraclitean flux (see 440d7-e2) and the stability of forms. Cf the use of μετακοσμεῖσθαι in fr. 7.

⁶⁵ The parallel with fragment 8 was seen by E. Weerts, *Plato und der Heraklitismus: ein Beitrag zum Problem der Historie im platonischen Dialog, Philologus*, Supplementband 23, 1 (Leipzig, 1931), 27-29. Weerts, arguing against the Aristotelian view that Plato argued for the Forms from the extreme flux of the sensible world, believes the whole aporia is a mimesis of Eleatic, particularly Zenonian, dialectic.

It does seem plausible that Plato is using a variant on this Eleatic strategy here: the belief in the natural theory, i.e., that there are stable natures and that names reveal them, has led to the contradictions of extreme flux, and the possibility of there being nothing determinate at all. This however conflicts with the assumption of stable natures that make knowledge possible; and so reason forces us to assume the existence of Forms, with the Eleatic allusion fitting in nicely. This may seem very satisfactory, coming to rest in a modified Eleaticism that gives us back knowledge and dismisses the claims of language; but we should not stop there. One is still begging the question over the Forms, assuming them as a basis for an argument to prove their existence; flux of a vigorous sort faces a rigid Eleatic world picture; and even if coming to know has not been ruled out of court, it has been made to seem an impossible goal for men to achieve.

On one side there is indeterminate flux, on the other stable but ineffable Forms, symbolic of the gap between human and divine language. Mackenzie's argument that Plato is attacking the concept of the 'god's eye view' of the world as being of no use to *human* epistemology is convincing, even if her strong claim, that Plato has succeeded in ruling out coming to know altogether, fails to convince.

Looking back at the rest of the dialogue one can see that this dichotomy is not new; one need but remember how Socrates reveres the names that the gods themselves use as being undoubtedly true, in contrast to the human variety.⁶⁶ The latter is all we can speak, the former is literally unspeakable. Now if Forms are so foreign to us that we cannot even talk about them properly why bother with them?

So far I have claimed that the final aporia sets extreme flux against Eleatic-style Forms whilst denying that it constitutes an argument for the latter; the unattractive result of the argument encourages one to look at the possibility of less fickle sensibles and more approachable Forms. This is in itself an acceptable note on which to finish the dialogue, an implicit encouragement to persevere in discussing the problems of the dialogue. Two problems remain: whilst we might be unhappy with the results of this argument, can we be sure that Plato was? And so far the peculiarity of the argument remains unexplained: why does Plato think it appropriate to talk about extreme flux and Forms here? No commentator it seems to me really gets to grips with this point. The flux of the earlier part of the dialogue is surely not enough to justify complete indeterminacy. Also puzzling and ignored is Cratylus' reaction to the argument, emphatic agreement then a firm rejection of the moral.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ 391d4-e3; 400d6-401a1; and cf *Philebus* 12c1-3.

⁶⁷ Note the sequence of ἀνάγκη (439d7), ἀνάγκη again (d12), οὐδαμῶς (e6) and ἔστιν ὡς λέγεις (440a5), followed by the firm adherence to Heracliteanism at 440d7-e2.

The answer to both points, I suggest, lies in seeing the argument as at one level an *ad hominem* attack on Cratylus and his views, whilst at another level pointing to the inadequacy of the dilemma that has been presented to us. This then allows one to claim that Plato was aware that the argument needs attention, and that the inadequacies of it arise out of the argument of the dialogue as a whole, thereby challenging us the readers to do better.

The first point to stress is that almost from the start of the dialogue it is agreed that learning and knowledge are possible. In the case of Socrates and Hermogenes this is based on the axiom that there are stable natures that names, if they are to be correctly given, must in some way reveal—hence the tool analogy argument.⁶⁸ The prescriptive-descriptive distinction that I have laid emphasis upon is so vital to grasp because of the danger of assuming that one is dealing with a correct name or a language of correct names, leading to one interpreting the name rather than examining the thing. The etymologies have shown how many Greeks fell into temptation on this point; Cratylus however goes further than the rest. He not only agrees that names are teaching tools,⁶⁹ but also asserts that to know the name of x is to know x, and that studying names is the only way of learning and discovering.⁷⁰ According to the etymologies, and to Cratylus, things are in flux; therefore names, rather than things, offer the kind of stability that allows epistemology to progress. The relationship of the *nominatum*'s priority to its name has been completely inverted.

Socrates' arguments are aimed at putting this inversion to rights, as we have seen. The alternative etymologies demonstrate that names do not enjoy the semantic stability that Cratylus and others had assumed. Names too are in flux. Thus the natural theory of Cratylus has left us with nowhere in our world that has the stability to allow us to acquire knowledge. The commitment to the possibility of knowledge remains however, and this leads us inexorably to the discussion of Forms, revealing the total dissimilarity between Forms and flux.⁷¹ So far, so good. Why however is the flux said to be so extreme that nothing is determinate? All one needs for at least some determinacy is a small degree of stability, allowing for, if not timeless knowledge, at least tensed propositions such as 'I know that x was y at time t'.

⁶⁸ Cf *Parmenides* 135b5-c3, where Parmenides affirms the necessity of positing εἶδη and ἰδέαι of each thing on pain of destroying τὴν τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δύναμιν.

⁶⁹ 428e4-5.

⁷⁰ 435d4-436a8.

⁷¹ And so, I disagree with Irwin, art. cit., when he claims that the stable natures of 386de and 389ab are the same as the forms of 439-440; this is to claim in effect that nothing of note has happened in between the beginning and the end of the dialogue. One should remember that Socrates can only 'dream' about these Forms, whereas he had no such problem with those introduced earlier. Exactly what relationship they bear to the Forms of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* is impossible to say.

Recall however the curious confusions of Cratylus that I called attention to earlier, the desire to combine a mimetic theory with what I called the ‘infallibilist’ view, making names logically discrete pictures of their nominata. Any change in the picture that is the name means that the nominatum has changed or that one has merely emitted hot air.⁷² Socrates by contrast allows names to be more or less correct names so long as they still reveal the outline (τύπος) of the nominatum.⁷³ Looking at the final aporia, it is significant that Socrates uses προσειπεῖν and λεγόντων,⁷⁴ which echo the hypothetical case of someone misaddressing Cratylus at 429e3-7. Thereby Plato draws attention to the fact that Cratylus’ theory cannot cope even with moderate flux: the name is naming something that has become something else, whereas the τύπος-theory allows one to cope with such moderate flux as emerges in the etymologies.

This is highlighted by Socrates’ distinction between addressing a thing as ‘that’ (ἐκεῖνο) and as ‘such-and-such’ (τοιοῦτον); items in total flux are neither discriminable particulars nor the possessors of discriminable characters.⁷⁵ The reaction to this, having read through the etymologies, might be to question whether such a degree of flux should be introduced here; but Cratylus’ theory allows no such distinction to be made, for any difference in the characteristics makes it a different thing, to be named (‘addressed’) differently. Cratylus’ criterion of identity was the stability of the name; bereft of this, any small amount of flux is enough to cause him problems of the sort that Socrates indicates.

An objection might be that if flux here is not total, surely things can stay secure long enough to say something about their present or past status. Note however ἡ ἀνάγκη ἅμα ἡμῶν λεγόντων ἄλλο αὐτὸ εὐθύς γίγνεσθαι καὶ ὑπεξίεναι καὶ μηκέτι οὕτως ἔχειν;⁷⁶ even as we speak the thing becomes something else. On the face of it, this merely gives the negative alternative to the question of d8-9, can we name things in extreme flux; alternatively it could be making a new point aimed at Cratylus: the flux of names themselves means that when we name something the name itself does not stay still, and thus, according to Cratylus’ peculiar theory, the nominatum changes—it literally becomes something else. This interpretation then gives a fresh *ad hominem* point to d10-11, and provides additional force to Cratylus’ reply of ἀνάγκη, for according to his theory this is necessarily true. And it answers the objection: even if things stay still for long enough, names do not, or so the course of the

⁷² 429b12-430a5.

⁷³ 432d11-433a2.

⁷⁴ 439d8, 10.

⁷⁵ Thus Thornton, art. cit., p. 584. Others (e.g. Calvert, art. cit., p. 37, Mackenzie, art. cit., p. 138) translate τοιοῦτον as ‘that’, which seems to miss the subtlety of Socrates’ argument. Cf. e.g., ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλοιον at 440a1.

⁷⁶ 439d10-11.

dialogue appears to have shown. Hence if Cratylus' naturalism is right, the world is truly indeterminate.

This then justifies Socrates' talk about extreme flux: it arises out of Cratylus' own theory. As such, it is not to be assumed that Plato believed in the extreme flux of sensibles, and one can attribute to him awareness of the unsatisfactory nature of the argument as it stands. A more general point is that one can now readily explain the discrepancy between *Timaeus* 49-50, where we are expressly told that we can use τοιοῦτον of sensibles,⁷⁷ and the apparent indescribable nature of the phenomenal world in the *Cratylus* (and the *Theaetetus*): if the *Cratylus* is putting forward extreme flux as the outcome of Cratylus' mistaken views, there is no need to see a contradiction between it and the *Timaeus* on this issue, and good reason to believe that he explicitly rejects total flux for the sensible world.⁷⁸ Given that Socrates also points to the distinction between particulars and their characters which would help to avoid Cratylus' muddles, it is plausible to maintain that he was well aware of the deficiencies of the argument here.

This awareness extends, I would claim, into the second half of the aporia too. Cratylus, we have seen, is an 'atomist', and so a situation where he is forced into accepting the total stability of knower and known on pain of giving up the fundamental principle of the dialogue, that we can acquire knowledge, is a fine *ad hominem* attack. He has to choose: either stand by the fluxy theories of his master and give up the possibility of knowledge, or go over to the other camp and embrace Eleaticism. Both sides of the dilemma are unsatisfactory, but they arise from his unfortunate beliefs, and offer a warning to others who look to etymology to back up their ideas.

This interpretation suggests that Plato took Cratylus very seriously as a philosophical opponent and thus reinforces my conclusions in 1.5. That the dilemma here presented can be avoided is clear; it is up to the reader to recognize that and ponder on what has gone wrong, and how it can be put right.

⁷⁷ The relationship between *Cratylus* 439-440, *Timaeus* 49-50 and *Theaetetus* 181-3 has been widely discussed; see, e.g., Owen, art. cit., pp. 322-325; Cherniss, art. cit., pp. 349-360; Thornton, art. cit., pp. 584-586; N.H. Reed, 'Plato on Flux, Perception and Language', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* N.S. 18 (1972), pp. 65-77. Cherniss, followed by Reed, puts forward an alternative view of the reference of τοιοῦτον in the *Timaeus*; contra, see Thornton.

⁷⁸ So Thornton, loc. cit.

CONCLUSION

By this point I hope to have made plausible the claim that the *Cratylus* is a well-constructed dialogue. The apparently abrupt opening, the silence of Cratylus, the loquacity of Hermogenes, all in different ways illuminate the differences between their approaches to language and that of Socrates. The care in writing extends to the emphasis on the vocabulary of teaching and learning, listening and investigating, words which take on a greater significance in the context of an examination of the truth-telling powers of names. Most importantly, I have tried to show that the etymologies are not the embarrassing error of judgement they might appear to be, but play a vital role. Plato had two related aims in writing the dialogue, one being in a sense a deeply personal matter, the other a more dispassionate philosophical goal. The former aim was to reject one of the early influences upon him, Cratylus, and to write a further chapter in his *apologia* for the life and philosophy of his true master, Socrates, whilst the latter was to put names in their place.

The *Cratylus* in one sense marks Plato's philosophical farewell to Cratylus, and puts forward Socrates as the model of the genuine teacher. Throughout I have emphasised how Plato subtly differentiates the two, despite calling attention to superficial similarities between their theories and their apparent reluctance to give their own points of view; my interpretation of the final aporia stresses how important Cratylus and his views remain right to the bitter end of the dialogue. If this view of the dialogue is not too wide of the mark, one can speculate that Cratylus' influence upon Plato was not inconsiderable, and that it was important to him to mark his break with Cratylus in a very final way; ironically he thereby immortalized the name of his erstwhile 'teacher'.

The more general philosophical aim of the dialogue was to demonstrate that Greek thinkers and poets had consistently put too much trust in names, implicitly regarding them as surrogates for the things they named. Such trust could only make sense when dealing with an ideal language, which Greek certainly was not. To show the extent of this fallacy and to refute it required a thorough examination of names, which Socrates duly carried out; a measure of the difficulty of the task he set himself is his abject failure to halt such speculations, as the later history of Greek thought and literature demonstrates. Seen in this light, the etymologies are not an irrelevant and tedious interlude, but a vigorous attack on a tendency in Greek (and not only Greek) thought to overvalue names. They offer us Plato's ironic and schematic overview of Greek speculations, a witty, polemical account far removed in tone from Aristotle's

discussions of the errors of his predecessors. In one respect at least the *Cratylus* is more satisfactory than the *Theaetetus*: whereas in the latter dialogue Socrates merely asserts that all the poets and philosophers of the Greek language bar the Eleatics had been supporters of the Flux doctrine,¹ in the *Cratylus* he gives us a lengthy 'proof' of his claim.

Thus far it may seem that I am saying that the *Cratylus* has a historical importance in that it attacks contemporary Greek culture and its representatives, an importance which makes it worth studying on that score. Does it however have more than mere historical significance for modern readers? We still have many intractable problems with the relationship between names and things, but the terms of the debate in the *Cratylus* seem extremely remote from our concerns. Today etymology figures rarely in theoretical works of general linguistics, having retreated to occupy a niche in historical linguistics; the era of language speculation is past, to be replaced by (not very successful) attempts to produce an international auxiliary language, such as Esperanto, aimed at facilitating communications rather than determining the natural classes of reality. The *Cratylus* thus can be dismissed as a curious essay in language speculation, of interest to some linguists, literary theorists and classical scholars, but of no real intrinsic importance to philosophers.

This, it seems to me, is to underestimate the value of the dialogue. There are two connected points I wish to make here. Firstly, I will quote the ringing endorsement of the dialogue's value by a prominent modern philosopher, Bernard Williams: 'This brilliant, tough-minded and still underestimated dialogue does not only show that the idea of language's having mimetic powers could not explain what language is; it leaves the belief in such powers looking like what it is, a belief in magic.'² Plato's attempt to convince his contemporaries that names are not the easy aids to knowledge that they thought they were is not irrelevant to modern readers, challenging us to beware of a similar belief in magic. Some remarks of Russell's are also relevant:

There is a good deal of importance to philosophy in the theory of symbolism . . . I think the importance is almost entirely negative, i.e., the importance lies in the fact that unless you are fairly self-conscious about symbols, unless you are fairly aware of the relation of the symbol to what it symbolizes, you will find yourself attributing to the thing properties which only belong to the symbol. That, of course, is especially likely in very abstract studies such as philosophical logic, because the subject-matter that you are supposed to be thinking of is so exceedingly difficult and elusive that any person who has ever tried to think about it knows you do not think about it except perhaps once

¹ *Theaetetus* 152e2-9.

² B.A.O. Williams, 'Cratylus' Theory of Names and its Refutation', in *Language and Logos: Studies Presented to G.E.L. Owen*, edited by M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum (Cambridge, 1982), 83-93 (p. 92).

in six months for half a minute. The rest of the time you think about the symbols, because they are tangible, but the thing you are supposed to thinking about is fearfully difficult and one does not often manage to think about it. The really good philosopher is the one who does once in six months think about it for a minute. Bad philosophers never do.³

Plato is calling on us to be careful of our symbolism, the names that we use. This seems to me an important task; one might call it the 'cleaning of philosophical tools'. The better we understand those symbols, the better the chances of penetrating beyond them to an understanding of the *nominata* themselves.

This might seem an important but, as Russell says, rather negative task, yet there is a more positive side, in that the *Cratylus* leaves a model of how namegiving should be done. I have stressed that the prescriptive theory that Socrates outlines is not tied to any particular historical situation, since he makes no claims about any actual languages fulfilling the demands of that prescription. What he does do is to lay down how one should go about improving language, using dialectic and judicious innovation. We can reshape our language as our knowledge grows. Names, contrary to Cratylus' beliefs, are not fixed for ever, but can be changed for the better—or worse. We can, as Hermogenes claimed, be the masters of our language; but the nature of the *nominata* must be our guide. There is no reason to doubt that Plato believed that the prescriptive theory was valid; what it requires for the full realisation of its potential is the acquisition of wisdom, something that Plato would never lay claim to lightly. This explains his apparent lack of interest in the project in later dialogues.

Similarly, there is no need to doubt that he believed in the desirability of a language that was as mimetic as possible,⁴ though such a language remained a distant goal. This being so, there were more important things to concentrate one's energies on than names, hence his comment in the *Politicus*: καὶν διαφυλάξης τὸ μὴ σπουδάζειν ἐπὶ τοῖς ὀνόμασιν, πλουσιώτερος εἰς τὸ γῆρας ἀναφανήσῃ φρονήσεως.⁵

A caveat has to be sounded here. I have argued that one of the problems with such an ideal language is that the only truly competent user would be the dialectician, who would possess the knowledge embedded in that language already, and thus have no real need for it. In addition, names, whether mimetic or not, inevitably fall short of truly representing their *nominata*; the ideal is not to speak the ideal language but to have the soul of a wise man.⁶ The prospect of an ideal language is liable to make men lazy; they start to think that the

³ B. Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, edited, with an introduction, by D.F. Pears (La Salle, Illinois, 1985), p. 44.

⁴ 435c2-3.

⁵ *Politicus* 261e5-7.

⁶ See 3.4.

'secondhand' wisdom contained in names is a substitute for acquiring knowledge oneself. It is as though one were satisfied with having a perfect photographic representation of a beautiful meal instead of having it at a table in front of one, waiting to be eaten. Russell remarked once that 'notational irregularities are often the first sign of philosophical errors, and a perfect notation would be a substitute for thought';⁷ the problem with Socrates' ideal language is that it might become a substitute for thought. Having said this however, the ideal remains distant; and the notion of an ideal language as a measure against which to measure existing languages is useful, at least in philosophical circles.

This model of name-giving cannot be put to productive use if one does not take careful note of Plato's warning against trusting in etymology. The belief that names possess mysterious powers that allow them to reveal the truth to the right person is inimical to clear thinking about the relationship between names and things. Plato's warning is couched in powerful prose, accounting perhaps for his failure to convince his contemporaries and later Greeks to beware of etymology. Yet even if many of those contemporary and later Greek readers missed the point of the dialogue, they at least in general gave the etymologies their due, seeing them as the central feature of the *Cratylus*.⁸ The same cannot be said of modern readers; the collapse of naturalism as a viable theory of naming combined with our ignorance of the background to the etymologies has led to this long central section of the dialogue being all but disregarded. No interpretation that does not make the etymologies in some way central can hope to do the *Cratylus* justice and explain the unity of the whole. This study is an attempt to go some way towards a unified interpretation of the *Cratylus*.

⁷ In his introduction to L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, revised edition (London, 1974), p. xviii.

⁸ Though cf [Alcinous] *Didaskalicus* vi (p. 160.2-34 H), an epitome of the dialogue that focuses on the tool analogy argument, not the etymologies; the latter are mentioned however:.... τὸν ἐτυμολογικὸν τε τρόπον ὅλον ἐν τῷ Κρατύλῳ διεξέρχεται

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